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Crisis in the Gulf

TV News Coverage of the Persian Gulf Crisis: Phase I

How have the networks covered the developing crisis in the Persian Gulf? We analyzed all 872 Gulf-related stories that appeared on the ABC, CBS, and NBC evening newscasts during August 1990. This saturation coverage filled 25 hours 8 minutes of airtime in only 30 days following the Iraqi invasion of Kuwait on August 2. That makes it the most intensive TV news coverage of any story in the past decade. Future *Media Monitors* will update TV's coverage of the Persian Gulf as the crisis unfolds.

Major findings:

Media Monitor (Copyright 1990) is published ten times a year by the Center for Media and Public Affairs, a nonpartisan and non-profit research organization. The Center conducts scientific studies of how the media treat social and political issues. Yearly corporate (\$50.00) and individual (\$25.00) subscriptions are available.

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■ **Big News-** Five out of every six TV news stories in August were about the Persian Gulf crisis. *Page 2*

■ **Seeing Saddam-** Saddam Hussein was quoted in 59 stories, nearly half as often as George Bush. *Page 2*

■ **Zapping Saddam-** More than 100 sources criticized Saddam; 13 called him evil or criminal. *Page 3*

■ **Rally Around What Flag?-** Nearly three out of five sources criticized U.S. handling of the crisis. *Page 3*

■ **Looking for J.R.-** Three out of four sources condemned oil price hikes; 90% criticized business, including the oil industry. *Page 4*

■ **Memories -** America's involvement in the Vietnam War was mentioned nearly once per day. *Page 2*

The crisis in the Persian Gulf generated 872 stories on the network evening newscasts in August, representing 25 hours 8 minutes of coverage, or 84 percent of the entire newshole. CBS devoted the most airtime to the Gulf story - 8 hours 55 minutes, compared to 8 hours 23 minutes on ABC, and 7 hours 50 minutes on NBC.

Crisis Coverage

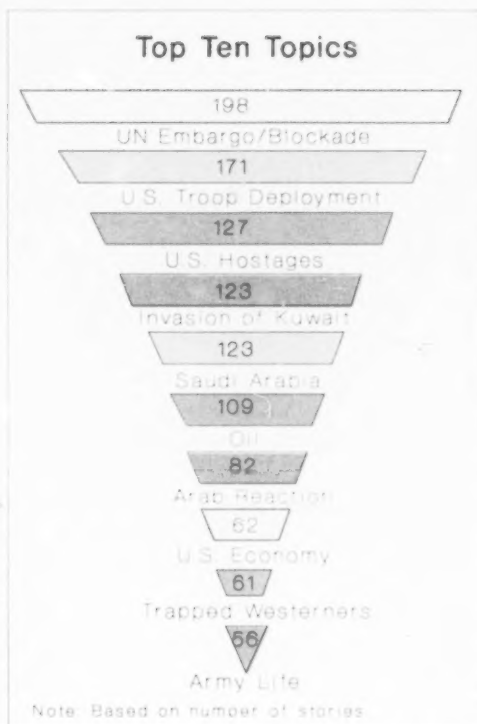
Topping the news were two initiatives designed to thwart Iraq-the UN economic blockade and the deployment of U.S. troops to Saudi Arabia. Nearly one out of every four Gulf stories (198) discussed the blockade, while another 171 were focused on the U.S. deployment. The American hostages were also big news, with 127 stories devoted to their plight.

The plight of Kuwait ranked only fourth among the topics covered, tying with Saudi Arabia as the focus of 123 stories each. Oil, seen by some as a prime motivator of the crisis, was featured in 109 stories, while other aspects of the U.S. economy were discussed in 62 stories.

The specter of past U.S. military conflicts was rarely raised. There were five references to the U.S. intervention in Grenada and six to its more recent invasion of Panama. Both incidents were cited by Iraqi officials in efforts to justify their actions in Kuwait. But America's last major war, Vietnam, was mentioned 25 times in August, nearly once per day.

The View from Over Here

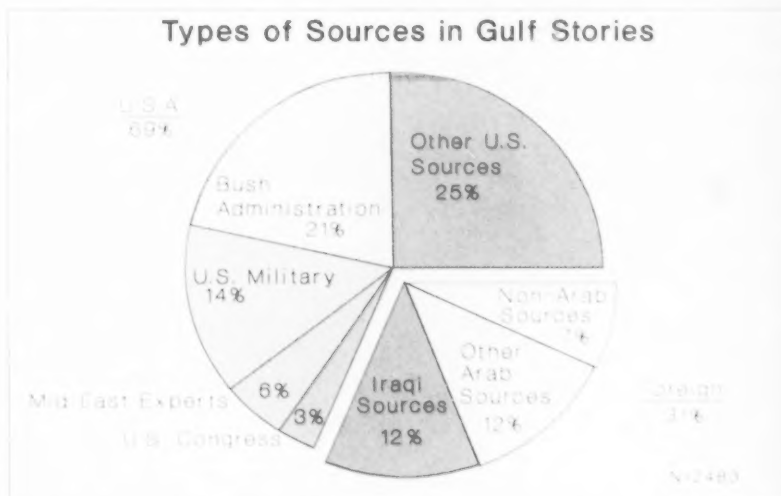
Despite the international cast, two out of every three sources cited (1701 out of 2483) were identified as Americans. One out of every



five sources were U.S. government officials, led by President Bush (124 citations) and Defense Secretary Cheney (31). The U.S. military also had a high profile, accounting for one in seven (14%) source citations. Congress, which was in recess for much of August, accounted for only 3% of all sources.

Iraqi nationals, usually officials of the Iraqi government, were quoted 298 times. Saddam Hussein was quoted 59 times, nearly half as often as George Bush. Arabs (including Iraqis) accounted for one out of every four sources quoted on the evening news.

With reporters barred from Iraq, Kuwait, and Saudi Arabia during the early phases of the crisis, interviews with Middle East and military experts became a vital part of news gathering. There were 132 experts quoted on the nightly news, an average of more than four per night. The most visible experts were often paid consultants to the network on which they appeared. Retired General George Crist led the pack, appearing on CBS 10 times over the course of the month. Other regulars were: former Ambassador Richard Murphy, seen 6 times on NBC; Judith Kipper and Anthony Cordesman, 5 times each on ABC; and retired Admiral William J. Crowe, who was in 4 stories.



Spotlight on Saddam

In many ways, the crisis has been presented as a personal struggle between Saddam Hussein and George Bush. By dominating the Gulf story, both became targets for extensive praise and criticism. Bush received 33 clearly positive or negative evaluations. But debate over his role was dwarfed by the focus on Iraq's leader. Saddam Hussein was the target of 121 evaluations, almost four times as many as the American president.

Bush proved relatively popular, receiving about two positive evaluations for each negative assessment (64% positive). By contrast, six out of seven judgments on Saddam (86%) were negative. That left the Iraqi ruler on the receiving end of more than 100 negative assessments. Moreover, one in eight criticisms (13 in all) went beyond the bounds of normal political discourse to portray Saddam as criminal or evil. These condemnations came from both U.S. officials and ordinary people. Thus, NBC quoted Defense Secretary Cheney, "I think he's an evil man." (NBC 8/12). On CBS, an Arab refugee en route to Jordan sounded even more alarmed: "He is not human being! He is killer, he is killer!" (CBS 8/25)

Although a handful of Iraqi and Jordanian sources praised Saddam for standing up to the West, Arab sources as a group gave him negative evaluations 68% of the time. Even network reporters got into the act, providing only one positive assessment of Saddam, compared to 18 negative evaluations. NBC's Tom Brokaw, for example, called Saddam a "ruthless and calculating ruler." (NBC 8/6) Such stark judgments by reporters, while relatively infrequent, further tilted the tone of the coverage against the Iraqi leader.

Rating the Players

Despite the largely favorable commentary President Bush received, nearly three out of five (58%) evaluations of how the U.S.

Evaluations of Bush and Saddam Hussein*



This is becoming a television negotiation: brinksmanship by television.

-Dan Rather
CBS, 8/28/90

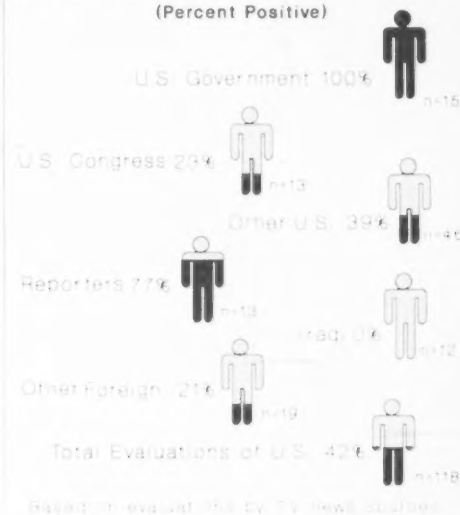
handled the crisis were negative. The key policy areas for the U.S.--the troop deployment, the blockade, and the hostages--saw approximately equal numbers supporting and criticizing U.S. policies. The main sticking point for the Administration were sources who criticized its handling of overall U.S.-Iraqi relations, especially past support for the Baghdad regime.

Even among domestic sources, only a slight majority (53%) supported U.S. handling of the crisis. Among foreign sources, praise was far more rare; 87% criticized various aspects of U.S. policy. Not surprisingly, Iraqi government sources were the most frequent source of criticism. When the U.S. government expelled most Iraqi diplomats, for example, the Iraqi ambassador called the move "uncalled for, unfair, and unjust. We feel we have been victimized once more." (CBS 8/27) But only one out of five non-Iraqi foreign sources supported U.S. policy.

By contrast, both the U.S. military and the United Nations received mostly favorable press during the crisis. The government of Iraq, however, fared even worse than its

Source Ratings of U.S. Government

(Percent Positive)



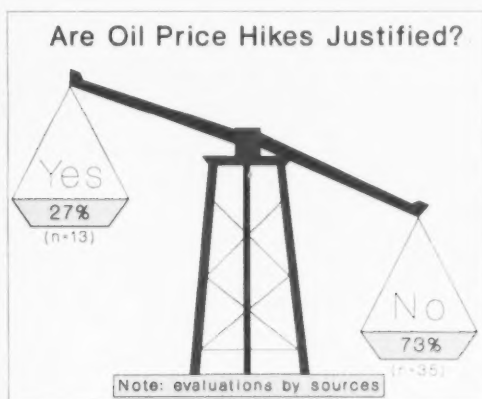
leader. Only 9% of the 113 evaluations of the Iraqi government were positive. Many of these criticisms centered on the invasion of Kuwait and the seizure of Western hostages. For example, when Iraq released videotapes of the hostages, White House spokesman Marlin

Fitzwater declared that "to hold men, women, and children as targets for viewing is sick beyond expression." (CBS 8/24)

As the Gulf crisis seemed to portend an economic downturn in the United States, some of the criticism turned against U.S. business, especially the major oil companies. Although discussed less often, criticism of business was proportionally as negative as coverage of the Iraqis. Nineteen of 21 sources (90%) provided negative evaluations of business during the crisis.

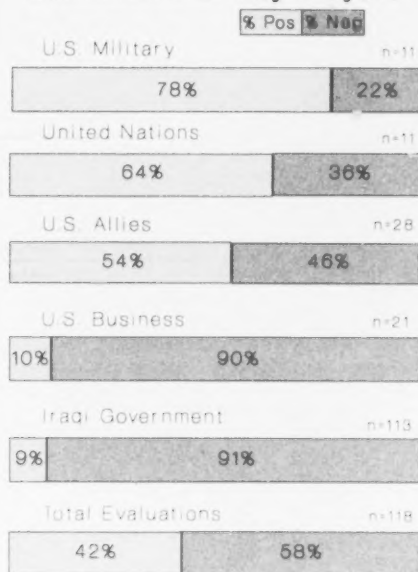
Raising the Price

Criticism of the oil companies focused intensively on rising oil prices. Nearly three out of four sources (73%) argued that price hikes were not justified by events in the Persian Gulf. Virtually all those who defended higher prices came from the oil industry. Among sources not connected to the oil industry, 90% said that the hikes were unjustified.



On one CBS broadcast, Senator Joseph Lieberman (D-CT) charged, "there is no doubt that in the last week American consumers were ripped off on a massive scale"; and consumer activist Mark Green was even more direct: "Big

Evaluations of Key Players*



*Based on number of explicit evaluations aired on TV evening newscasts, 8/2 - 8/31

Television seems to be not just covering the crisis, but mediating it.

-Tom Shales
Washington Post,
8/29/90

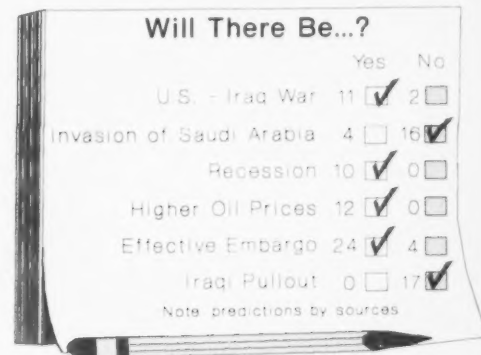
Media Monitor

Oil is using Saddam Hussein to pick consumers' pockets." (CBS 8/7)

Future Shocks

Once the Iraqi seizure of Kuwait was accomplished, much of the coverage became speculative. We coded 522 statements which raised a variety of future possibilities. The most frequent object of speculation was a war between the U.S. and Iraq, a possibility that was raised 125 times. An Iraqi invasion of Saudi Arabia was mentioned 69 times, and the possibility that Iraq might use chemical weapons was raised 30 times. Nearly two-thirds of all speculative statements revolved around highly negative outcomes such as war, other violence, or economic chaos.

Most of these statements simply raised various possibilities without predicting their outcome. When experts and others did venture guesses about the outcome of the crisis, most were pessimistic. Eleven out of 13 sources (84%) predicted an eventual war between the U.S. and Iraq. Moreover, all 22 sources who were quoted on economic scenarios foresaw bad times ahead. Twelve predicted higher oil prices, and another 10 forecast an economic recession in



the U.S. When the possibility was raised that Iraq might retreat from Kuwait on its own accord, all 17 sources rejected the notion. Tempering the general air of pessimism, three out of four sources felt that an invasion of Saudi Arabia would be unlikely, and six out of seven argued that the UN economic sanctions against Iraq would be effective.



Free Speech vs. Obscenity

The Debate Over Government Standards for Speech and Art

How have the media covered the ongoing public debate over controversial speech and art? To find out, we analyzed media coverage of issues ranging from the obscenity prosecution of the rap music group "2 Live Crew" to the Congressional debate on government funding of art with sexual or political content. We examined 234 news and opinion pieces that appeared in the *New York Times*, *Washington Post*, and the ABC, CBS, and NBC evening newscasts from January through September 1990.

Major findings:

- **Censuring Censors** - Most sources favored government support for art and rejected restrictions on NEA grants. Page 2

- **Who Says?** - Opinion was split on government deciding what's obscene. Government standards were usually upheld in the *Washington Post* and TV news, but opposed in the *New York Times*. Page 2

- **Bad Boys** - 2 Live Crew's songs were usually described as obscene. Robert Mapplethorpe's pictures were not. Page 2

- **Pornographers vs. Puritans** - Highly negative language was used to describe the pro-restriction side over twice as often as the pro-expression side. Page 3

- **X Rated Actors** - Anti-pornography groups were the most heavily criticized for the role they played, but all parties fared badly. Page 4

Blue News

For the period January through September 1990, we analyzed media coverage of forms of expression that were charged with being indecent, obscene, or pornographic. This included the debate over government subsidy of controversial art, as well as efforts to prohibit speech and art that allegedly offended public standards of decency. We examined 234 news items, including 28 stories on the ABC, CBS, and NBC evening news, 98 articles in the *New York Times*, and 108 articles in the *Washington Post*. This included not only hard news, but also editorials, signed columns, and art and music reviews. Much of the media debate took place in the opinion-oriented sections of the newspapers. Moreover, the balance of views expressed was usually similar in news and opinion pieces. We note below the only major instance in which differences appeared.

The most frequently reported controversy (87 items) concerned the ongoing Congressional battle over government funding for controversial art by the National Endowment for the Arts (NEA). Close behind (74 items) was judicial news, mainly involving local prosecutions of the rap group 2 Live Crew and Cincinnati museum director Dennis Barrie. The third most frequent topic concerned homosexuality (37 items), in connection with homoerotic artistic imagery. Nearly as frequent (36 items), were discussions of children's access to provocative or obscene material.

Fit to Print?

The most newsworthy controversies involved the rap group 2 Live Crew (103 mentions) and the photographer Robert Mapplethorpe (97). A debate over misogyny, racism, and antisemitism in rap music came to a head in the Florida obscenity trial and eventual acquittal of 2 Live Crew. Mapplethorpe's homoerotic

Subjects of Controversy		
	Mentions	Percent Obscene*
1) 2 Live Crew	103	83
2) R. Mapplethorpe	97	33
3) K. Finley	21	19
4) D. Barrie	13	38
4) A.D. Clay	13	8
4) A. Serrano	13	46
7) H. Hughes	9	0
7) D. Wojnarowicz	9	44
7) Adult Cable TV	9	89
10) Adult Videos	5	20



*Percent of mentions alleging that the speech or art in question is obscene.

"The most hysterical reaction to popular music is underway since...the Pope declared tango dancing a mortal sin."

-Jon Pareles
New York Times, 4/1

photographs were featured in a show that was partly funded by an NEA grant. This became the lightning rod for an extended struggle in Congress over NEA appropriations and the propriety of government funding for such material. Other artists who figured in newsworthy obscenity/free expression controversies included Karen Finley, Andres Serrano, Holly Hughes, and David Wojnarowicz, whose work variously involved erotic imagery and strong

political and social commentary. Cincinnati museum director Dennis Barrie was in the news during his trial and acquittal on obscenity charges for showing a Mapplethorpe exhibition there. Comedian Andrew Dice Clay made news for his ethnic and misogynic jokes.

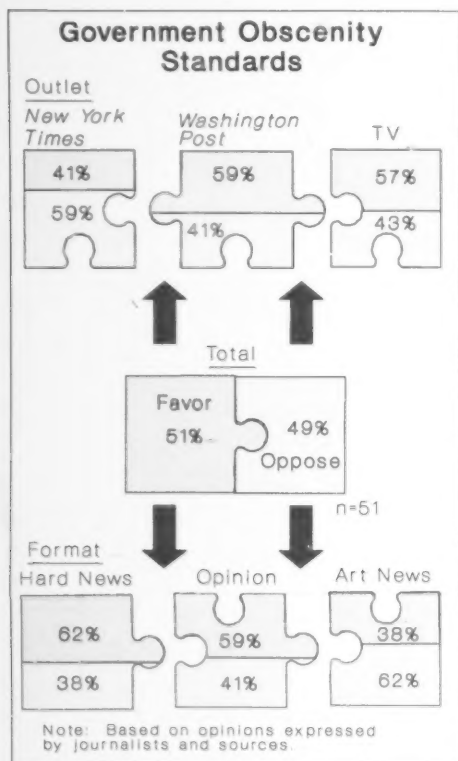
Although all these individuals were controversial, only 2 Live Crew was regularly charged with obscenity in news accounts. Five out of every six mentions of the rap group were accompanied by such charges. By contrast, Mapplethorpe's work was described as obscene in only one out of every three accounts. No other individual's work was called obscene in a majority of news items.

Liberty or License?

Much of the issue debate revolved around questions of government funding for art. Most statements by journalists and sources favored government support and rejected restrictions on NEA funding. This held true in both news and opinion articles. The principle of government support for the arts was favored by 62% of journalists and sources. For example, Garrison Keillor called the creation of the NEA "one of the wisest and happiest pieces of legislation ever to come through Congress." (*New York Times* 6/20) In addition, 60% of all viewpoints rejected proposed content restrictions on NEA grants. Thus, Rep. Fred Grandy (R-IA) declared, "you cannot have art without risk." (*New York Times* 6/20) Among those favoring restrictions, Sen. Jesse Helms (R-NC) argued, "It is an issue of soaking the taxpayer to

fund...homosexual pornography..." (*New York Times* 4/20) On the specific proposal that the NEA should require a "no obscenity" pledge from grantees, the coverage was more balanced -- 48% of viewpoints in agreement and 52% opposed.

The most frequently debated question (51 viewpoints) was whether government should set standards regarding obscenity or pornography. This debate included the NEA controversy, as well as FCC regulations on obscenity in broadcasting, warning labels on recordings, etc. Opinions were about evenly divided, with 51% in favor and 49% opposed to government standards of obscenity. However, there were significant differences in the balance of opinion across



media outlets and news formats. A majority of viewpoints from TV news (57%) and the *Washington Post* (59%) favored government standards. A majority of those in the *New York Times* (59%) opposed such standards.

By the same token, more than three out of five viewpoints in hard news stories (62%) and nearly that proportion in opinion columns

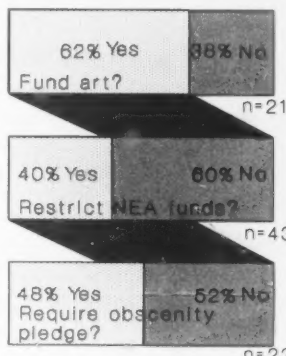
(59%) favored government standards. For example, the *Times* (6/30) quoted representative Dana Rohrabacher, "It shouldn't have been that

difficult to reject sacrilegious and pornographic art. It is time we set some standards." Yet art section news and reviews produced the opposite result, with 62% of opinions opposed to government rules or guidelines. Thus, a White House source was quoted in the *Times*' "Arts" section (6/13), "we don't think that art should be censored by statute."

Although opinions were balanced as to whether the government should set standards for obscenity, censorship in general got a bad press. One of the most frequently voiced

arguments was that any censorship establishes a dangerous precedent that will lead to more serious infringements on personal liberty. This argument was presented 21 times in news and opinion articles and was rejected only once -- a

Should Government...



Note: Based on opinions expressed by journalists and sources.

"The First Amendment says, 'Congress shall make no law...' It does not say, 'Congress shall subsidize.'"

-Charles Krauthammer
Washington Post, 8/27

A Bad Precedent?

Yes
95%



No
5%

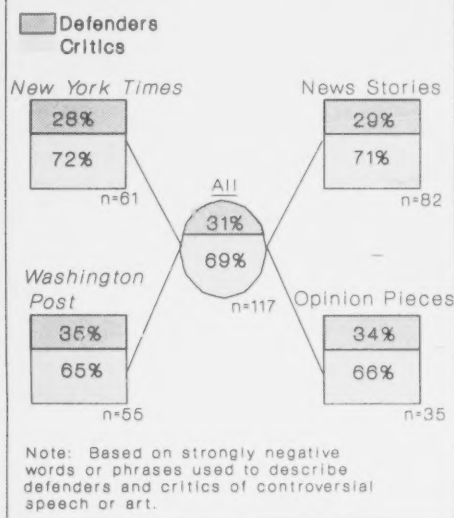
Note: Opinion that any limitation on free expression creates momentum toward further loss of civil liberties.

95% rate of agreement. For example, the *Post* (5/16) quoted producer Joseph Papp, "An attack on the arts is always a precursor to other kinds of restrictions."

Dirty Words

The coverage featured a great deal of colorful language, as the two sides hurled epithets at each other. Those favoring controversy

Targets of Negative Language



sial modes of expression were ridiculed as "immoral," "pornographers", and "smut peddlers", while those favoring restrictions were derided as "bigots", "McCarthyites", and "demagogues". The pro-restriction side was the target of more than two out of three (69%) of the 117 epithets coded. Moreover, the margin was almost identical in news and opinion articles, and in both the *Post* and the *Times*. (Such language was very rare on the television networks.) For example, *Times* reporter Peter Steinfeld (7/7) recounted a *Newsweek* article that depicted the critics as "the righteous," "the new intolerants," "stiff-necked moralists," and "third-rate Savonarolas." The *ad hominem* character of the debate is illustrated by *Times* columnist Anthony Lewis, who argued (6/8), "a small band of religious zealots and right wing opportunists is trying to show the world that America is an intolerant puritan country, contemptuous of artists."

X Ratings

Most of those involved were given bad marks for their handling of the controversy. Indeed, their media images at times resembled those political campaigns in which nothing good

"Murder Imitates Porn Magazine Layout"

"Man Listens to Rock Music, Kills Mother"

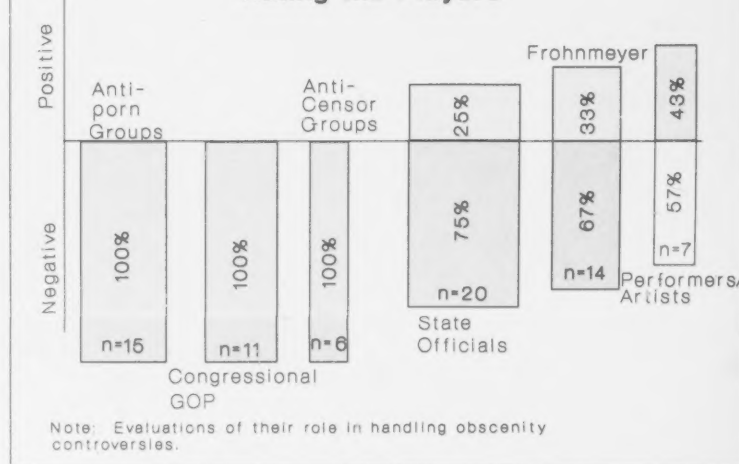
"Liberated Women Don't Find Utopia"

American Family Association Journal, cited in *New York Times*, 7/2

is ever said about anyone. Sharing 100% negative ratings were Congressional Republican critics of controversial art (including Senator Helms and Representatives Rohrabacher, Coleman, and Gunderson), anti-pornography groups, and anti-censorship groups. However, the former were criticized far more often than the latter. Thus, self-described anti-pornography crusader Reverend Donald Wildmon was the target of ten negative portrayals, compared to a total of six for all anti-censorship groups.

Other parties to the controversy fared almost as badly. Ratings of state officials involved in censorship efforts were negative by a three to one margin. For example, the *Times* (7/8) quoted the 2 Live Crew album "Banned in the USA": "Corrupted politicians playing games/bring us down to boost their fame." Similarly, two out of three ratings of NEA Chairman John Frohnmayer were negative. Ironically, the most favorable ratings (still only 43% positive) were received by the performers and artists whose work touched off the debate.

Rating the Players



"Today no American family can be secure against the danger that one of its children may decide to become an artist."

-Garrison Keillor
New York Times, 4/4

1990 - The Year In Review TV's Leading News Topics

During 1990 we monitored 13,768 news stories broadcast on the ABC, CBS, and NBC evening news. We also logged 3025 jokes about public affairs from monologues on the "Tonight Show", "Late Night with David Letterman," and the "Arsenio Hall Show." This annual review issue of *Media Monitor* chronicles the leading news topics and targets of political humor on television during 1990. It also contains an in-depth report on the biggest TV news story of 1990, the crisis in the Persian Gulf.

Major findings:

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■ **Big News** The Gulf Crisis produced 2334 stories, nearly half of all TV news airtime since August - the most intensive coverage we have ever logged.

Page 3

■ **Non-News** German reunification, the war on drugs, and the savings and loan crisis all failed to make the top ten list of news topics.

Page 3

■ **Vote News** 1990 mid-term election news was more negative and less balanced than in 1988. Republican candidates fared worse than Democrats.

Page 3

■ **Peace News** Most sources opposed U.S. military action in the Persian Gulf and criticized U.S. Gulf policy.

Page 5

■ **Punchlines** Dan Quayle edged out George Bush and Saddam Hussein as the most joked-about newsmaker on late-night TV in 1990.

Page 4

Newswatch

During 1990 13,768 news stories were broadcast on the ABC, CBS and NBC evening news shows. The ten most heavily covered news topics accounted for a majority (54%) of the entire news hole. Five of last year's top ten topics remained on this year's list. In fact the USSR (second), the economy (third), and crime (fifth) retained their 1989 rankings. Dropping out of the top ten were Eastern Europe, China, drugs, aviation safety and Panama. (Our tally is based on substantive topics, so it doesn't include institutional "beats" like the Presidency and the Congress. For example, a story about congressional reaction to events in the Soviet Union would be included under USSR coverage.)

The Top Ten

#1 Persian Gulf In only five months the Gulf crisis generated 2334 TV news stories, the most intensive coverage of a news event that we have ever logged. An in-depth report begins on page five.

#2 USSR The 1320 stories devoted to the Soviet Union far surpassed the coverage devoted to 1989's number one topic, Eastern Europe (972 stories). The primary focus was on Soviet relations with the United States (251 stories), including the three summits between Presidents Gorbachev and Bush. Internal turmoil was also heavily covered, as several Soviet Republics asserted their independence. Lithuania alone was the subject of 199 stories. The political arena was another major source of Soviet news, as reforms and government shake-ups were frequently reported (147 stories). Economic difficulties and food shortages also attracted a substantial amount of coverage (105 stories). USSR coverage will be analyzed in depth in a forthcoming issue of *Media Monitor*.

#3 Economy/Business Short news pieces reporting on the state of economic indicators led the coverage with 68 stories, followed by more in-depth reports on such substantive issues as the banking industry (55), the prospect of a recession (43), and inflation (37).

#4 Health Issues Efforts to find cures for AIDS and other diseases provided the primary focus of health news (77 stories). The harmful effects of smoking, including controversies over cigarette advertising, also received heavy coverage (51 news reports). Rounding out this topic were reports on new medicines (44 stories), health problems facing children (36), and cancer (27).

#5 Crime America's law and order problem remained high on the media agenda in 1990, as stories on murders or homicide statistics were aired 86 times. High profile crimes, including Washington D.C. Mayor Marion Barry's drug arrest (55 stories), also made news. Other frequent topics were the death penalty (19 stories), child abuse (18) and rape (14).

#6 South Africa Political changes, including the release of black activist Nelson Mandela from prison, made South Africa a major story in 1990 (See *Media Monitor*, Aug/Sept 1990). The apartheid system and its reform generated by far the most news (166 stories). Relations with the U.S. produced 61 reports, as both President De Klerk and Nelson Mandela visited the United States.

#7 Disaster/Accidents News of natural disasters was led by 59 stories on fires, including forest fires, industrial fires, and a fire aboard a Swedish ferry. Close behind was news of floods (58 stories), primarily in the southern and northwestern United States.

#8 Budget The 1990 federal budget attained unusual prominence as partisan battle lines were drawn over taxes. Coverage of the federal deficit led the way with 99 reports. Congressional debate over the budget package produced 55 stories, while the White House's role was the subject of 33.

#9 Environment Earth Day festivities sparked heavy coverage of the environment -- 38 stories appeared during the week before Earth Day. Pollution topped all environmental topics with 74 news reports. Oil spills were the focus of an additional 59 stories. The plight of animals in our changing environment was a third major topic with 45 stories. Environmental news was the subject of the April 1990 *Media Monitor*.

#10 Israel Israel's ranking in the top ten 1990 news topics is another indication of the growing

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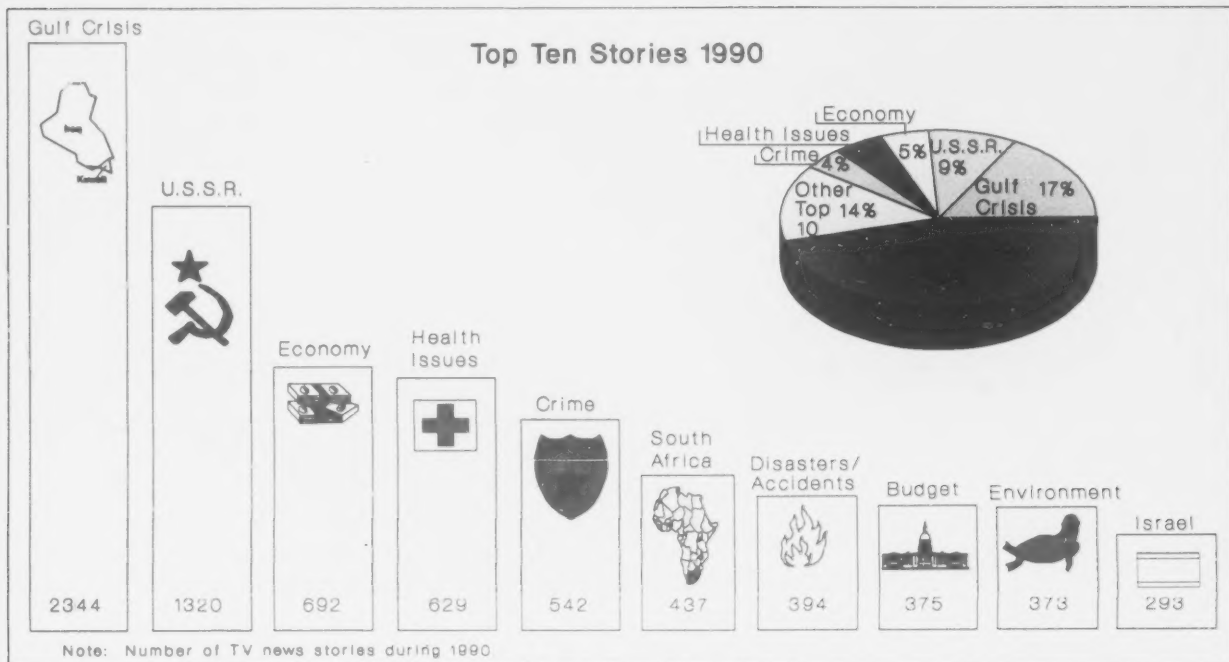
tensions in the Middle East. Spurred by the Temple Mount killings, the Palestinian issue received heavy news coverage (82 stories). Strains in U.S.-Israeli relations provided the other major focal point of the coverage (53 stories).

The three networks followed similar news agendas on most major topics. NBC broke from the pack on three stories: NBC devoted less coverage to the environment than its competitors, airing only 86 stories, compared to 142 on ABC and 145 on CBS. By contrast, NBC offered the heaviest coverage of Germany, with 111 stories (vs. 88 on ABC and 69 on CBS); and on illegal drugs, with 94 stories (vs. 71 on ABC and 50 on CBS).

previous German states) was the subject of only 268 news reports in 1990, compared to 327 stories on East Germany alone in 1989.

News coverage of the war on drugs dropped by almost 60%, from 518 stories in 1989 to only 215 stories in 1990. The savings and loan scandal also failed to attract heavy coverage. The 168 stories on this topic were aimed most frequently at the "Keating Five" (the five U.S. Senators charged with improprieties).

Finally, television's 1990 campaign coverage demonstrated the medium's lack of interest in mid-term elections. Only 170 stories were aired on the 1990 state and federal contests, compared with 2201 stories on the 1988 presidential contest. The tone of 1990 election coverage was



The News That Wasn't

The 1990 TV news agenda was also notable for some stories that did not make the top ten list. The most noteworthy of these was German reunification, which marked the official end of Europe's cold war division. Despite this story's historic significance, Germany (including both

more negative and less balanced than in 1988. That year both presidential candidates received about twice as much criticism as praise from on-air sources. This time around Democratic candidates collectively received two to one negative coverage, but Republicans fared much worse - seven to one negative. The heaviest coverage went to the North Carolina Senate race (Jesse Helms vs. Harvey Gantt), but Republicans fared worse than Democrats in coverage of congressional, senatorial and gubernatorial races.

Media Monitor

Punchlines

During 1990 researchers logged all jokes about public affairs or public figures by late-night comedians Johnny Carson, Arsenio Hall, Jay Leno and David Letterman. The most frequently joked about topics and individuals in the 3025 jokes are listed in the accompanying tables.

Topics

Iraq: The weather in Iraq is changing...the temperature at night can go below 32 degrees. I guess hell really can freeze over. (Leno 12/4/90)

Environment: Exxon had another spill...off the coast of New Jersey and the environmentalists were back today cleaning the oil off the syringes. (Carson 1/3) Good news, June Allyson has switched to cloth diapers. (Letterman 4/24)

Savings and Loans: A guy held up the Silverado Savings and Loan yesterday and got away with over a million dollars of IOU's. (Leno 9/4) They say there's no recession, but Charles Keating had to lay off two Senators today. (Leno 12/17)

Personal Jokes - 1990

1. Dan Quayle	162
2. George Bush	147
3. Saddam Hussein	137
4. Marion Barry	83
5. Ronald Reagan	65
6. Mikhail Gorbachev	64
7. Manuel Noriega	56
8. David Souter	37
9. Neil Bush	17
10. Jim & Tammy Bakker	16

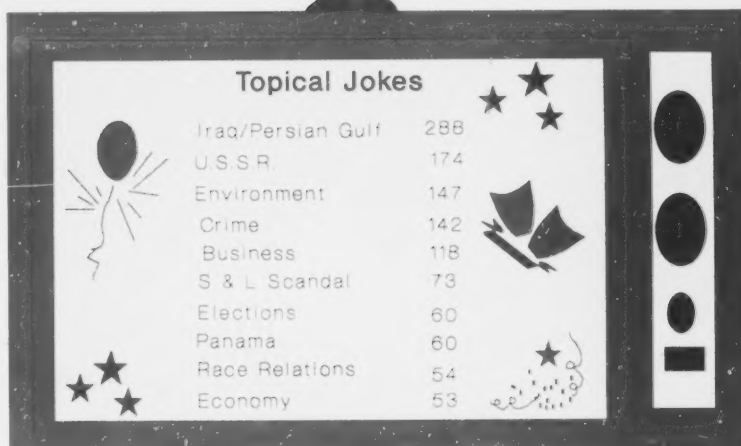
Individuals

Dan Quayle:

*President Bush signed an executive order that raised Vice President Quayle's salary. Quayle's getting more money, provided he makes his bed and mows the lawn. (Carson 12/13)

*Even though he wasn't on the ballot, NBC News is still projecting Dan Quayle as a loser. (Letterman 11/7)

*Do you think Dan Quayle ever jokes about smart people? (Hall 11/09)



George Bush:

*Ladies and gentlemen, it's 12:30. Do you know where your President stands on raising taxes for the wealthy? (Letterman 10/12)

*Sonny Bono announced he may run for the U.S. Senate. We've got a bonehead in the White House, why not a Bono in Congress? (Hall 11/14)

Saddam Hussein:

*The Zsa Zsa Gabor of the Middle East (Hall, 8/3)

*Replaced George Steinbrenner as the world's most hated man (Carson, 8/3)

*The stupidest guy to control oil since Jed Clampett (Hall, 11/30)

*The hardest working tyrant in show business (Letterman, 11/30)

Prelude to War Television News Coverage of the Persian Gulf Crisis

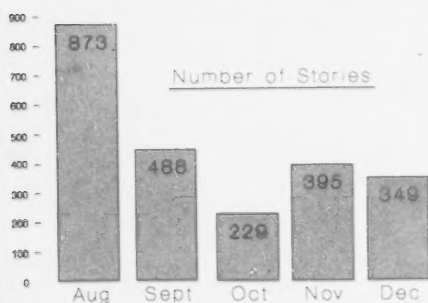
The Big Story

The crisis in the Persian Gulf was by far the biggest TV news story of 1990. From August 2 (when Iraq invaded Kuwait) through December 31, the network evening newscasts broadcast 2,334 stories on the Gulf crisis. Nearly half of all airtime on the evening news (46%) was devoted to Gulf coverage during the last five months of 1990. CBS led the pack, spending 22 hours 17 minutes reporting and analyzing the crisis. ABC aired 21 hours 26 minutes of Gulf coverage, and NBC provided 20 hours 26 minutes of crisis news. (The substantive analysis that follows is based on the newscasts from August 2 through November 30, 1990).

Hail to the Chief?

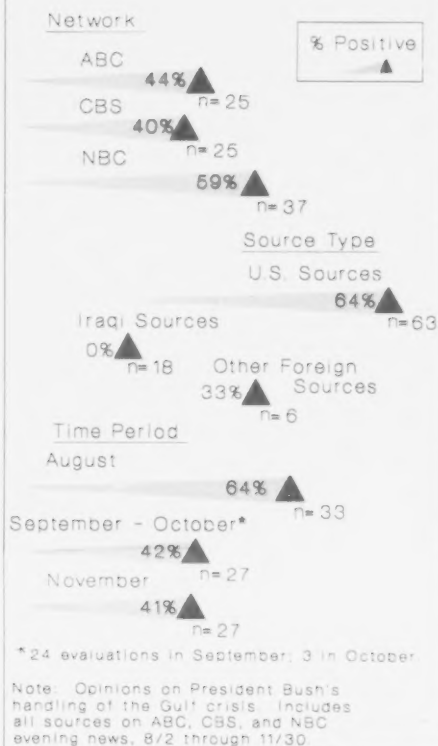
President Bush received his best press in August, when nearly two out of three news sources voiced support or praise for the President's handling of the crisis. Thereafter,

Gulf Coverage Over Time



almost three out of five sources criticized Bush's role. The growth of an anti-war movement was one reason for the increased criticism. One protest leader read an open letter to Bush on NBC: "I'm afraid that...you will wager my son's life in a gamble to save your political future." (NBC 11/30)

Rating Presidential Performance



The growing visibility of Iraqi government officials is another reason why Bush's favorable press ratio dropped. Iraqi sources appeared on the evening news 18 times to criticize Bush's handling of the crisis. Typical was the Iraqi Deputy Prime Minister, who said that "George Bush is leading the world to a ruinous war that could last years." (NBC 11/28) In contrast, nearly two out of three American sources (64%) praised Bush. For example, an American hostage in Baghdad told ABC's Ted Koppel, "we want you to tell the President of the United States that we think he's doing the right thing." (ABC 8/15)

Policy Put-Downs

Despite the networks' balanced treatment of Bush, U.S. Gulf policy received mostly failing grades. Overall, 63 percent of sources made negative comments about U.S. policies,

Media Monitor

while 37 percent supported them. Even among U.S. sources, fewer than half (45%) offered support for American policy, while an overwhelming 85 percent of non-U.S. sources (mainly Iraqi officials) voiced criticisms.

The deployment of U.S. troops to the Gulf was the most frequently debated policy action. During August and September, sources split about evenly, with 49 percent in favor of sending troops and 51 percent opposed. Typical was the comment of Sen. George Mitchell that, "American interests and our long-standing ties with Saudi Arabia make the President's decision to help defend Saudi Arabia the correct one." (CBS 8/8) By contrast, three out of four sources (76%) criticized the second deployment in November. Former Navy Secretary James Webb complained, "The President's error in sending too many troops should not be compounded by a further error of using them in a premature, unprovoked ground offensive." (NBC 11/29).

Rating U.S. Gulf Policy

News Sources	% Positive Ratings
Administration	n=47 70%
Congress	n=31 19%
Reporters	n=27 63%
Other U.S.	n=94 34%
Iraqi	n=32 3%
Other Foreign	n=39 26%

Note: Opinion by sources on ABC, CBS, and NBC evening news, 8/2 through 11/30

(61%) presented viewpoints against U.S. military action. Only 18 percent of sources came out unequivocally against a war, however; the other 43 percent provided some sort of partial or qualified anti-war statement. The latter group argued for giving sanctions more time to work, stressed the dire consequences of war, etc. For example, Mikhail Gorbachev reportedly told George Bush, "What's the rush? There is always plenty of time to go to war." (NBC, 11/19)

In contrast, only 13 percent of sources firmly supported the war option in November, while another 26 percent provided qualified support for military action. These latter sources stressed the various justifications for a war against Iraq. For example, Secretary of State James Baker stated that, "We will not let Saddam Hussein's aggression stand, and that requires putting ourselves in a position to use force, if that becomes necessary." (CBS 11/10)

[UPDATE: On the eve of war the debate became both more balanced and more polarized. Between January 1 and January 15, 56 percent of sources provided anti-war viewpoints, and most of those were firmly anti-war. Similarly, most of the 44 percent who supported the war were firm supporters. Although the House and Senate voted to authorize the use of force, 80 percent of congressional sources quoted were anti-war.]

Saddam Bombs

The chief villain in the crisis was Saddam Hussein. Among Saddam's 216 evaluations, 86 percent were negative. Most of his support came from Iraqis, Jordanians, and Palestinians. Moreover, one in eight criticisms (27 in all) went beyond the bounds of normal political discourse to portray Saddam as criminal or evil. For example, Senator Alfonse D'Amato called Saddam, "the new Hitler." (CBS 8/2)

War and Peace

After the second troop deployment, the prospect of war became the primary focus of debate. In November, a majority of sources

Should We Go to War?

November, 1990

Anti-War	Pro-War
18% Total	43% Partial
	26% Partial
	13% Total

n=100

January, 1991

Anti-War	Pro-War
38% Total	18% Partial
	20% Partial
	25% Total

n=92

Note: Opinions by sources on the ABC, CBS, and NBC evening news.

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February 1991

Soviet Disunion

TV News Coverage of the USSR in 1990

How have the networks covered the struggle for political and economic change in the Soviet Union? We analyzed 1345 stories with a cumulative airtime of over 34 hours that appeared on the ABC, CBS and NBC evening newscasts during 1990.

This month's *Media Monitor* also presents the first findings on TV news coverage of the war with Iraq. Initial findings are for ABC evening newscasts from January 17 through February 8. Future *Monitors* will include the other networks as time permits.

Media Monitor (Copyright 1991) is published ten times a year by the Center for Media and Public Affairs, a nonpartisan and non-profit research organization. The Center conducts scientific studies of how the media treat social and political issues. Yearly corporate (\$50.00) and individual (\$25.00) subscriptions are available.

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Major Findings:

■ **Inside Story** Three out of four stories were broadcast from within the USSR, and three out of four sources quoted were Soviet citizens.

Page 2

■ **Goodbye Gorby, Hello Boris** Two out of three sources criticized Gorbachev's performance, while a majority praised Yeltsin. Gorbachev did better among U.S. sources than among Soviets.

Page 3

■ **The God That Failed** Sources overwhelmingly criticized the Communist party, the Soviet government, and the Soviet economy.

Page 4

■ **Dividing Line** Sources were split over endorsing secession movements in the Baltic states.

Page 4

Gulf War - First Reports:

■ **Weapons Yes, War No** Sources cheered the performance of U.S. weapons and troops but jeered the war itself and U.S. policies in the Gulf.

Page 6

■ **Not So Pretty Pictures** TV "visuals" have shown civilian damage more frequently than aerial combat.

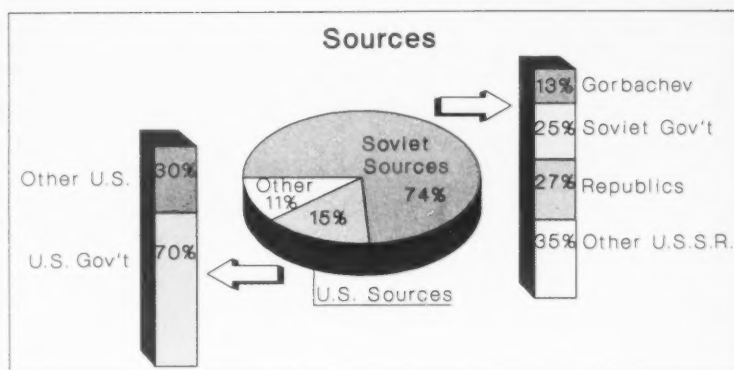
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Back in the U.S.S.R.

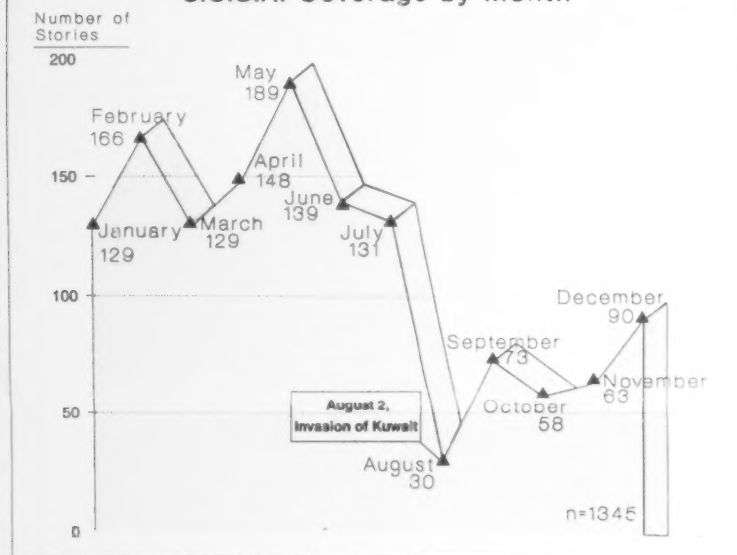
To determine how television news has covered this time of change in the USSR, we analyzed all stories about the Soviet Union during 1990. This was TV's second biggest story of the year, after the Persian Gulf crisis. The three network evening newscasts together devoted 1345 stories, and 34 hours 8 minutes of airtime, to the USSR. CBS devoted the most airtime (11 hours 38 minutes) despite running the fewest stories (428). ABC ran 474 stories (11 hours 36 minutes) and NBC aired 443 reports (10 hours 54 minutes).

The Iraqi invasion of Kuwait drastically reduced TV's interest in the Soviet Union. Cumulative USSR coverage dropped from a nightly average of five stories from January through July to one story per night in August and two per night during the last four months of 1990.

economic situation made headlines, and the coverage rose in December after the resignation of Foreign Minister Eduard Shevardnadze.



U.S.S.R. Coverage by Month



Early in the year, the news was dominated by unrest in the Soviet republics, including independence movements in the Baltics and ethnic violence in Armenia and Azerbaijan. The coverage peaked in May, when Gorbachev met with Bush in Washington. The continuing crisis in Lithuania and the election of Boris Yeltsin as President of the Russian Federation also made news. Throughout the fall the worsening eco-

Dateline Moscow

American television tried to cover the unfolding drama in the Soviet Union through the voices of the contending forces. Nearly three out of four sources quoted (74%) were Soviet citizens. Government officials were heard most frequently, accounting for 38 percent of Soviet sources. (Mikhail Gorbachev accounted for one third of these; he was cited in 334 stories.) Americans accounted for only 15 percent of all sources, with the U.S. government responsible for seventy percent of this subset.

Almost three out of four field reports (570 stories) were filed from within the USSR, permitting a more internalized Soviet perspective. By contrast, only 18 percent of all field reports originated from locations in the USA. (These totals do not include 577 anchor-read "tell" stories. These brief stories served mainly to sum up the day's events.)

The Media Menu

The foremost news topic was the Soviet economy. The 360 economic stories focused mainly on food shortages and the conditions of average citizens. Several other topics received

heavy coverage. Secessionist movements in the republics (including the Baltics, Azerbaijan, Georgia and Moldavia), were mentioned in 341 stories. Superpower relations were an issue in 330 stories, led by heavy coverage of three meetings between Presidents Gorbachev and Bush.

Soviet defense policy was mentioned in 322 stories. Many of these reports dealt with the use of force to quell unrest in the republics, or the troops returning from Eastern Europe. Internal politics were an issue in 302 stories. Political maneuverings, elections, and newly open and spirited debates dominated this political reportage. Other top ten issues included political reforms, Soviet foreign policy, agriculture, relations with a reunified Germany, and ethnic unrest.

Site of Field Reports

Soviet Union



United States



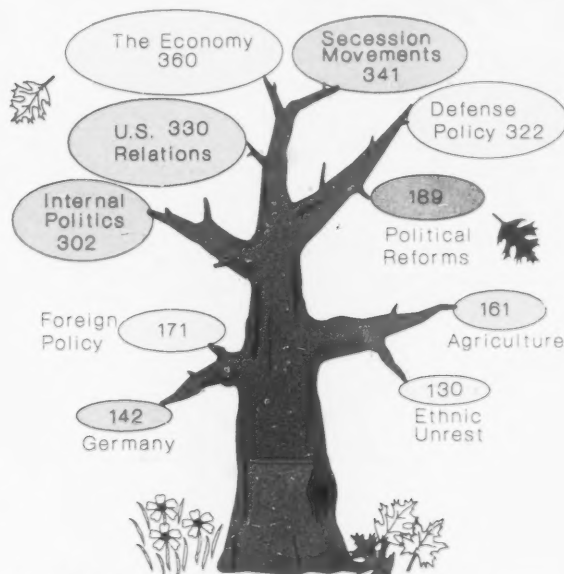
Other



from political reforms to agriculture policy. The political reforms implemented by Gorbachev were debated most frequently. They were criticized as insufficient by two out of three sources (68%). Boris Yeltsin typified the critics: "It's too little, too late and still not bold enough." (CBS 2/7/90) Soviet defense policy also came under fire, as four out of five (82%) sources voiced criticism. These critics focused on the use of force in the republics.

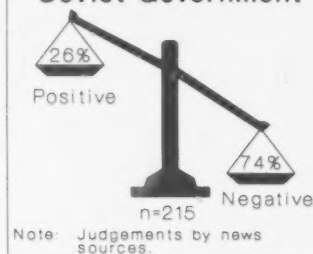
The Soviet government's dealings with Lithuania (especially the economic embargo) were also heavily criticized (80% negative). Lithuania's envoy to the U.S. told CBS (4/13), "You cannot deal with the Lithuanian people this way. You can't solve anything with paratroopers and armored cars." Other issues that elicited frequent criticism were the economy (90% negative) and agriculture policy (100% negative). Yegor Ligachev described the economic reforms as, "Five years of thoughtless radicalism and improvised swaying back and forth." (ABC 7/3/90)

Issue Coverage



Note: Number of stories mentioning each issue

Rating the Soviet Government



The Dustbin of History?

More than two hundred sources evaluated the performance of the Soviet government on various issues. Three out of four (74%) gave the government failing marks on everything

Boris Da, Gorby Nyet

Previous Media Monitors have always recorded mainly good press for Mikhail Gorbachev. In 1990, however, the Soviet leader was criticized by two-thirds (67%) of the 115 sources who evaluated his performance. As one Soviet citizen put it, "He's taken too many half measures, made too many compromises. He should be a more decisive figure." (ABC 1/31/90)

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Gorbachev's almost three to one negative ratio of sound bites from Soviet sources differs sharply from the good press (52% positive) he received from U.S. sources. For example, CBS quoted a student at Stanford University, "He's got great ideas about the world and I admire him very much." By contrast, rising media star Boris Yeltsin attracted a majority (56%) of favorable ratings. One Soviet citizen gushed, "I voted for Mr. Gorbachev, but I would give my arms and my legs to Mr. Yeltsin." (ABC 7/3/90).

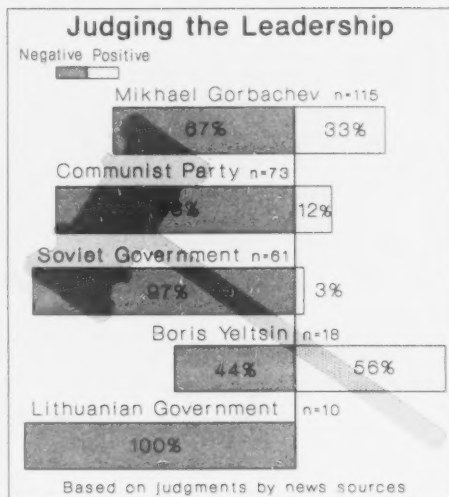
The Communist Party was treated with disdain by most sources (88% negative). For example, Yeltsin charged, "Life and the people were knocking at the party's door, but the party didn't hear. It didn't hear the tragedy taking place in this country." (NBC 7/12/90) Similarly, the Soviet government received overwhelmingly bad press (97% negative). One Lithuanian sounded a Reaganesque refrain, "The Soviet Union is super evil. We must decolonize this last empire." (CBS 2/5/90)

Finally, Soviet sources were the only ones to render judgments of the Lithuanian government, and they were unanimous in their disapproval. A Soviet journalist remarked, "Lithuanian nationalists ... have lost their sense of reality and responsibility." (ABC 4/15/90)

Let Your People Go

The issue debate was most heated on the fate of the republics. The 114 sources who addressed this issue sided narrowly with the freedom movements: 54 percent favored independence and 46 percent opposed it. This debate was highly polarized, as Soviet government sources argued unanimously against freedom for the republics. "The road to independence is ruinous and will only lead to a dead end." (Gorbachev, ABC, 3/30/90) Other Soviet sources were closely divided (55% for vs. 45% against). By contrast, U.S. sources were unanimous in advocating independence. Finally,

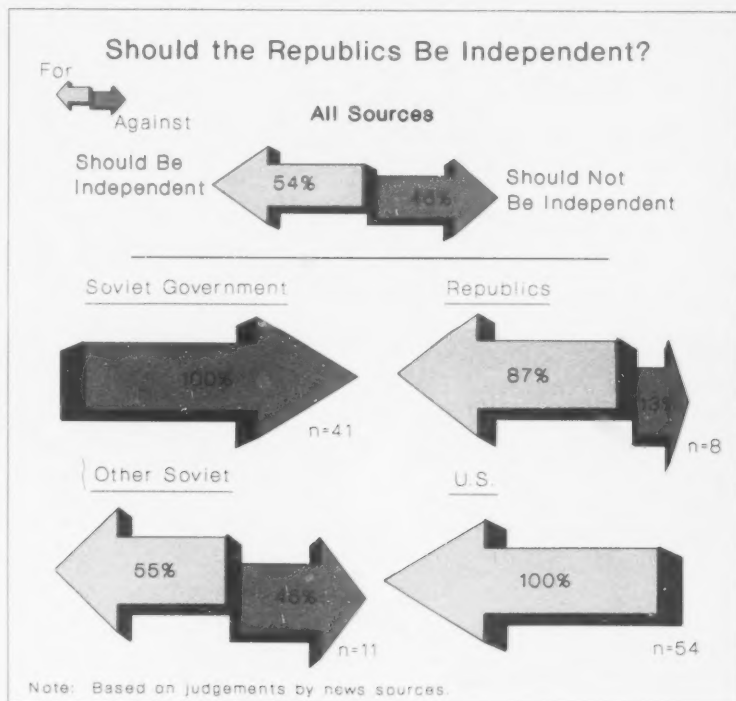
sources from the republics themselves overwhelmingly favored independence (87% to 13%). For example, one Estonian declared, "I think the Lithuanians are correct. They want independence and they should have it." (ABC 3/31/90)



Russian Bears

The state of the Soviet economy was discussed by more than a hundred sources during 1990. Every one of these sources declared that the economy was in dire shape. As one citizen put it, "Look how we live! The stores are empty, the farms don't work. They should have given the land back to us farmers long ago." (CBS 2/7/90)

As the economic crisis heated up in the latter part of the year, assessments of the economy in-



Judging the Economy



Note: Judgements of news sources.

creased. Nearly half of the evaluations were broadcast in the final four months, as an inefficient transportation system and the onset of winter worsened food shortages. CBS Moscow correspondent Barry Petersen reported, "...production has fallen off so much the economy is actually shrinking. The Soviets today called the situation a catastrophe, a nightmare." (9/17/90)

No More Cold War

As the curtain went down on the Cold War, U.S.-Soviet relations remained a major focus of media attention. In contrast to the downbeat tone of Soviet domestic news, sources overwhelmingly (by 89% to 11%) portrayed the superpower relationship as healthy. Most of these upbeat assessments come from Soviet or U.S. government officials. Gorbachev even asserted, "Today the Soviet Union and the U.S. no longer act as adversaries, but as partners." (NBC 11/19/90)

Future Shocks

Current problems competed for airtime with speculation about the future. We recorded 167 predictions about the future of the Baltics, the continuing political and eco-

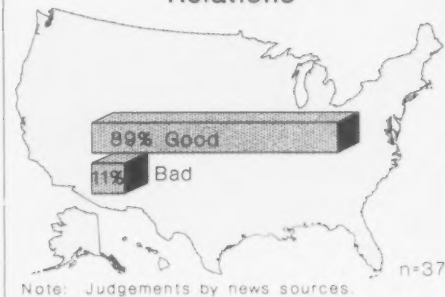
nomie reforms, the use of the military to quell independence movements, and the prospects for Gorbachev's presidency.

The scenario most frequently discussed was the secession of the Baltic Republics. Nine out of ten sources (91%) predicted that these tiny non-Russian countries would eventually be free. One year before the Soviet military crackdown, one Lithuanian predicted hopefully, "We will be as independent as Hungary or Czechoslovakia in a few years. Someday we'll be free as America." (CBS 1/10/90) The continuation of the economic reform efforts, designed to set the Soviet economy on the road to efficiency, was affirmed by most sources (69%), as was continued political reform (65%).

Although Gorbachev was widely criticized, the majority of sources felt he would not share the same fate as Nikita Khrushchev. Sixty-two percent of sources rejected the prospect that he might be ousted.

Finally, the likelihood of military involvement in the republics was rejected by two out of three sources. One Soviet foreign affairs expert said, "This country is not going to repeat the kind of approach to human life that existed under Stalin." (CBS 3/20/90)

Judging U.S. - U.S.S.R. Relations



Note: Judgements by news sources.

What Will Happen?

	Yes	No
Baltic States Will Secede n=23	91%	9%
Political Reforms Will Continue n=23	65%	35%
Military Will Subdue the Republics n=15	33%	67%
Gorbachev Will Be Ousted n=13	38%	62%
Economical Reforms Will Continue n=13	69%	31%

Note: Predictions by news sources

Television News Coverage of the Persian Gulf War

War news dominated the airwaves after the U.S. attack on Iraq began January 16. From January 17 through February 8, there were 338 war stories on ABC's "World News Tonight," the highest-rated evening news program. The war averaged nearly 15 stories per night, for a total airtime of 10 hours 6 minutes, or about 26 minutes per night. (Future *Monitors* will include the other networks, as well as prime time war news.)

Rating the Players

Nearly all (97%) of the 74 sources who evaluated the American military gave it high marks for its performance in the Gulf War. Although the U.S. Air Force and the Patriot missile received the most attention, praise was evenly split between weapons systems and troops. Typical was the comment from ABC analyst Anthony Cordesman, who noted that the U.S. had "achieved an astounding success in the air." (1/30) The Iraqi military also received mainly positive ratings from news sources, especially from U.S. defense officials.

Rave reviews of the military were the exception, not the rule, in coverage of the U.S. government. In fact, America's policies have gotten almost as bad press as Iraq's. Nearly three out of four sources (72%) criticized the U.S., especially for damage caused to civilian sites in Iraq. A majority of the critics were foreign, especially Iraqis and Jordanians. This compares to 77 percent of sources who criticized the Iraqi government for its actions, notably its Scud attacks on Israel and the release of oil into the Persian Gulf. However, President Bush personally fared better than his Iraqi counterpart. Eighty-six percent of sources criticized Saddam, including one Colorado grade-schooler who said that "people like Saddam Hussein should be dragged out into the street and shot." (1/23)

Rating the Players

	Percent Positive	Number of Sources
U.S. Government	28%	32
Iraqi Government	23%	22
U.S. Military	97%	74
Iraqi Military	58%	43
George Bush	57%	7
Saddam Hussein	14%	14

Source: ABC World News Tonight, 1/17 - 2/8

War and Peace

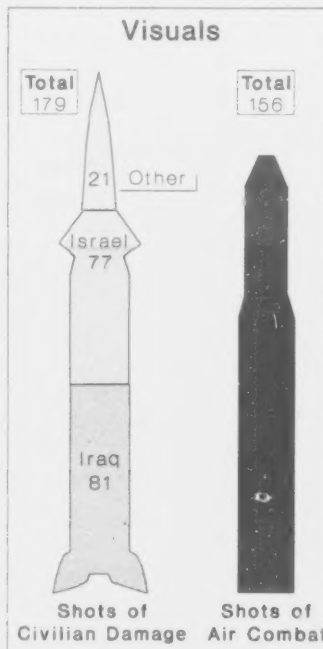
Even as media attention turned to the fighting in the Gulf, the domestic debate over the war continued. Since the conflict began, two out of every three sources (67%) have opposed the decision to go to war; nearly half of these sources were demonstrators or members of anti-war groups. For example, one protester condemned the "needless, unnecessary war against Iraq." (1/19) Even among non-activists, though, opposition outweighed support by 52 percent to 43 percent.

Stories about the anti-war movement aired 13 times, compared to 4 stories on pro-war demonstrations. By contrast, a *Times Mirror* poll released January 31 found that 9 percent of

Americans had attended pro-war rallies and 3 percent anti-war rallies. Thus, these media images of public opinion are out of synch with polling data.

Combat and Casualties

Despite the novelty of bombs-eye-views of the air war, ABC's coverage has featured more pictures of civilian damage (179) than of aerial combat (156). Most of the combat visuals shown have been shots taken by Allied planes while on their missions, or of Patriot missiles intercepting Scuds over Israel and Saudi Arabia. The pictures of civilian damage included 32 shots of human casualties and 147 pictures of damaged structures. Israeli casualties were the most visible; 18 of the 77 Israeli shots of civilian damage (23%) showed civilian casualties. In contrast, casualties were shown in 14 of the 81 visuals of Iraqi civilian damage (or 17%).



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More News Is Bad News for Bush

TV News Coverage of the Bush Administration During 1990

How does TV news cover the presidency? This is our second annual report on network evening news coverage of the Bush administration. This issue of *Media Monitor* examines 2,224 stories on the administration that aired on the ABC, CBS, and NBC evening newscasts. It also compares TV news evaluations of the president with his public approval ratings from Gallup polls.

This issue also examines coverage of the war with Iraq on ABC "World News Tonight." Next month's *Media Monitor* will present complete findings on Gulf War coverage for the three major networks.

Major Findings:

- **More Press But Less Praise** TV news coverage of George Bush increased by more than 50 percent in 1990, but nearly two out of three sources criticized him. *Page 2*
- **Bad News At Black Rock** CBS was toughest on the president, giving him 70 percent negative evaluations. *Page 2*
- **Molding Viewers' Views** Good press helped the president's public approval ratings more than bad press hurt them. *Page 4*
- **Now That We Need You...** Evaluations of the military ran 2 to 1 negative before the Gulf crisis, but 2 to 1 positive thereafter. *Page 3*

ABC's Gulf War Coverage:

- **Balancing Act** U.S. policies got almost as much bad press as Iraq's. *Page 5*
- **The Face Of War** Pictures of civilian damage were almost as frequent as combat visuals. *Page 6*

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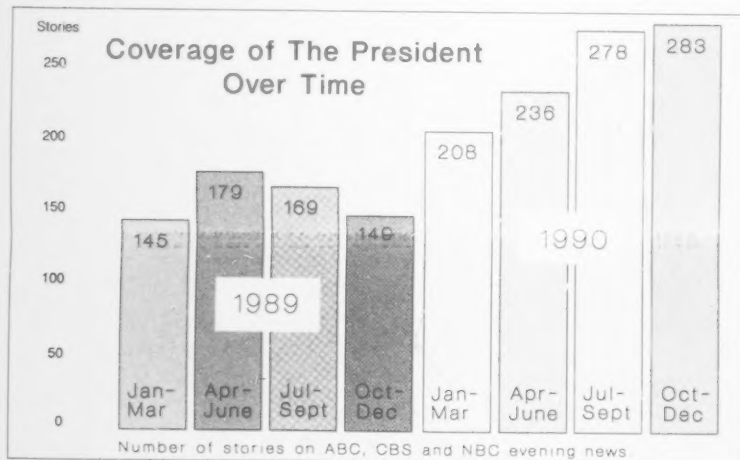
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Toni Mann

Finding the Spotlight

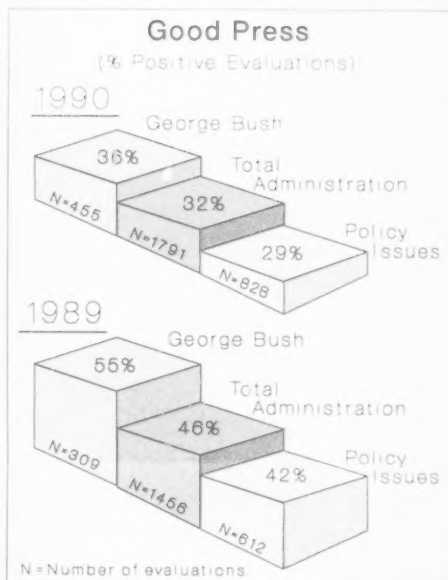
The Bush administration was featured in nearly one out of every six TV news stories during 1990 - 2,224 stories overall, with a total airtime of 66 hours 41 minutes. CBS led with 788 stories totalling 24 hours 27 minutes, followed by NBC (737 stories, 22 hours 21 minutes), and ABC (699 stories, 19 hours 53 minutes). After Iraq invaded Kuwait, daily coverage of the administration increased by 40 percent, from 5.2 to 7.3 stories per night.

In 1989 George Bush received far less personal coverage than other recent presidents had during their first year in office. Bush's 642 TV news stories that year paled in comparison to the 1,782 which featured Ronald Reagan in 1981. The invasion of Panama and the spring summit with Mikhail Gorbachev boosted Bush's visibility in 1990. The Gulf crisis added further to the president's prominence. By year's end Bush's TV news coverage had increased by more than 50 percent above his 1989 totals (642 vs. 1,005 stories).



The Honeymoon Is Over

Despite the rallying effect of the Gulf crisis, the Bush administration's media image soured during 1990. The president, his policies,



and the administration as a whole all received substantially more bad press in 1990 than in 1989. Among the 1791 statements by sources and reporters that evaluated some aspect of the administration, more than two out of three (68%) were negative. The president himself fared nearly as badly, attracting 64 percent negative evaluations. This marks a clear reversal from 1989, when a majority of sources praised the President. Finally, Bush's policies fared worst of all. Seventy-one percent of sources criticized the administration positions or handling of foreign and domestic issues.

Despite the generally negative cast of TV news coverage, some of the administration's key figures fared quite well. Secretary of State James Baker was frequently praised, rising from 50 percent positive evaluations in 1989 to 67 percent positive in 1990. Supreme Court nominee David Souter did even better, receiving 82 percent positive comments during his confirmation hearings. On the other hand, Vice President Quayle dropped from a 61 percent positive rating in 1989 to only 46 percent positive last year. For example, Ralph Nader cited Quayle to argue against a government pay raise: "If Quayle deserves a raise, the New York Yankees deserve the pennant." (CBS 12/28)

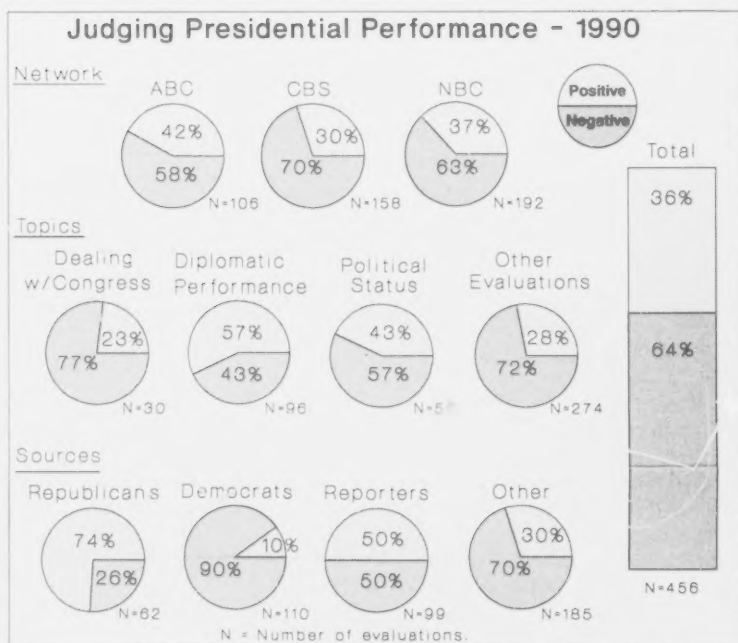
Jeers for the President

CBS was the network most likely to broadcast criticism of the president. Seventy percent of all evaluations of George Bush were negative on CBS, such as this blast from Sen. Edward M. Kennedy (D-MA) on October 22: "The president's veto of the Civil Rights Act of 1990...[is] part of a disreputable tactic to appeal to public resentment and prejudice." Bush's coverage was most positive on ABC, although evaluations still ran 58 percent negative. NBC split the difference with 63 percent bad press for the president.

All three networks provided mostly praise for Bush's diplomatic performance, especially following his August efforts at building an interna-

tional coalition to restore Kuwait. ABC's Brit Hume credited the international consensus on sanctions to "this president's personal and intensive style of diplomacy." (ABC 8/9) However, all other aspects of his job performance received mainly negative evaluations. The breakdown of budget talks in the fall prompted numerous criticisms of Bush's dealings with the Congress, contributing to his 77 percent negative rating on this front.

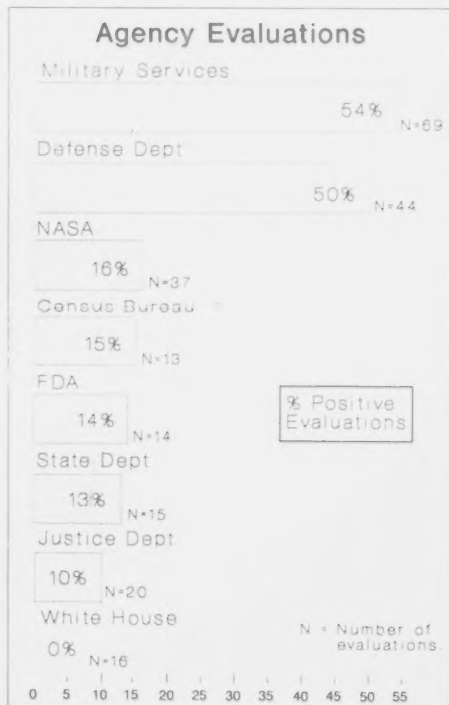
Three out of four Republican sources provided praise for Bush, while nine out of ten Democrats offered criticism. Democrat sources were more visible, however, outnumbering their GOP counterparts by nearly two-to-one (110 to 62). Non-partisan sources also had negative comments 70 percent of the time. The only group to offer evenly balanced evaluations of the president were reporters.



Cheers for the Troops

The military fared better on TV news than did their commander in chief. The Army, Navy, Air Force, and Marines collectively received slightly more praise than criticism, and the Defense Department got balanced ratings. Prior to the deployment of troops to Saudi Arabia in August, however, 70 percent of the military's evaluations were negative. Thereafter, 67 percent of sources offered praise, such as General Norman Schwarzkopf's paean: "American troops are the best people in the whole world, and they deserve all the support they can get." (ABC 8/31)

Every other government department or agency that was the frequent topic of discussion received largely negative reviews. NASA, plagued by shuttle delays and trouble with the Hubble telescope, was the most frequent target of critics (with 31 negative and only 6 positive evaluations). NBC's Robert Bazell was among the more charitable when he noted that "NASA's trying to do a lot of things at once with a limited budget and, as a result, they're not doing all of them



well." (NBC 6/29) Nonetheless, NASA's five-to-one ratio of criticism to praise was better than that of any other agency or department in the administration. Upon leaving Iraq, for example, an American hostage vented his anger at Foggy Bottom: "I want everybody to know our State Department hasn't lifted a hand for us." (CBS 9/2)

Home Field Disadvantage

Five out of every six evaluations of the administration's handling of domestic policy issues (83%) were negative. The budget debate in October spawned frequent criticism of tax and budget policies. Indeed, October was the worst month ever for George Bush's press coverage, with nearly unanimous criticism from sources on both policy handling (91% negative) and overall job performance (94% negative). Sample comment, from NBC's Jim Miklaszewski: "After two days of flopping, flipping, and flailing around on the budget and taxes, President Bush told reporters

he would make it all perfectly clear. But it only got worse." (NBC 10/11) Drug policy, the environment, civil rights, and the savings & loan crisis were all problem areas for the administration. In fact, no sources (not even administration spokesmen) appeared on the evening news during 1990 to support government policy on the savings & loan issue.

Foreign policy was also widely criticized, although the administration received more support in this area. Overall, 61 percent of sources criticized its foreign policy initiatives. The Persian Gulf crisis dominated debate and matched the overall three to two margins of bad press. Many of the negative statements on Gulf policy came from Middle East sources (mainly Iraqis, Palestinians, and Jordanians). In contrast, U.S. sources were almost evenly balanced (49% positive). One former hostage assessed Bush's efforts this way: "I'm alive. No Americans died. He did a great job." (ABC 12/10) Critics, on the other hand, complained about the build-up of troops in November. NBC aired testimony from former Navy Secretary James Webb, who charged, "The President's error in sending so many troops should not be compounded by a further error of using them in a premature, unprovoked ground offensive." (NBC 11/29)

Rating Administration Policies

	Percent* Positive	Number of Sources
All Policy	29%	828
Domestic Policy	17%	381
Drugs	35%	48
Taxes	19%	26
Budget	14%	64
Environment	10%	41
Civil Rights	7%	27
Savings & Loan	0%	19
Foreign Policy	39%	447
Panama	52%	29
Defense	45%	44
Persian Gulf	40%	197
Soviet Union	33%	48
China	33%	39

*Based on source evaluations

Early in the year, the foreign policy debate focused on the invasion of Panama. This was the only major issue on which a majority (52%) of sources supported the administration. While the president received plaudits for Panama, he was frequently criticized for his policy on China and the Soviet Union.

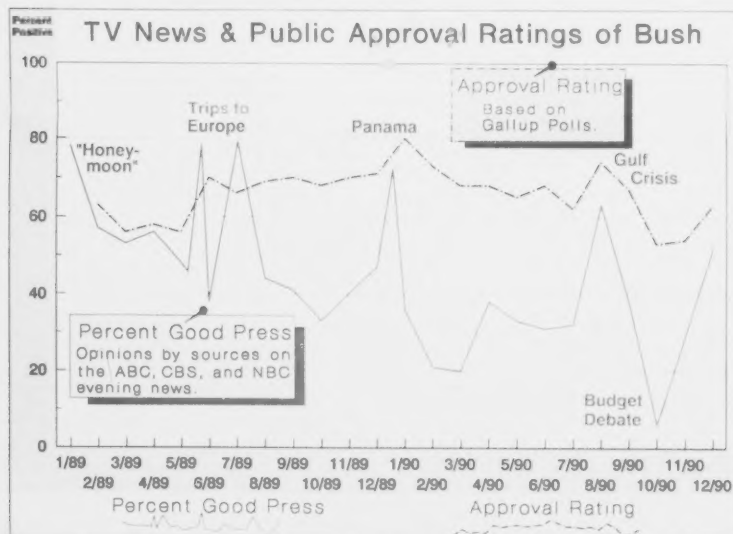
From Nielsen to Gallup

The ebb and flow of Bush's public approval ratings is directly related to his TV news coverage. During the past two years, his poll ratings have consistently shifted in the direction of his media "ratings" whenever the coverage was both intensive and one-sided. The infrequent but intensive periods of good press for the president have each been followed by a quick rise in approval ratings, as measured by Gallup

polls taken near the end of each month. They include the inaugural honeymoon, presidential trips to Europe early in 1989, the Panama invasion, and the first deployment of troops to the Persian Gulf. From July to August 1990, for example, Bush's level of good press rose from 32 percent to 63 percent. During this time, his public approval ratings rose from 62 percent to 74 percent.

Until recently, however, a prevalence of bad press was accompanied by more modest downturns in public support. This may reflect the president's low TV visibility. The volume of coverage has usually been much lower in Bush's many "bad press" months than in his few "good press" months. Indeed, his first sharp drop in popularity came in October 1990, after the budget debate brought his first intensive burst of bad press. That month Bush received the most evaluations of any month in his presidency, as well as the worst press - 94 percent negative, or 68 percent out of 72 evaluations by sources. During that period his approval ratings fell from 67 percent to 53 percent.

Since Bush's periods of good press have focused on foreign policy, while domestic policy debates have brought bad press, the coming months will represent a major test of his current popularity, as media attention returns to the home front.



Television News Coverage of the Persian Gulf War

Amount of Coverage

The Persian Gulf War set new records for TV news coverage. From January 17 until Bush's cease-fire declaration on February 27, there were 596 war stories on ABC's "World News Tonight," the most-watched evening news program. Coverage ebbed in early February during the third week of the air war, but returned with renewed intensity for a final, furious week of war and diplomacy. Indeed, the first and last weeks of the war included special expanded newscasts, which allowed the network's war coverage to exceed the entire 22 minute normal nightly newshole. In just 42 days, ABC devoted 17 hours and 56 minutes to the Gulf War, an average of more than 25 minutes per night.

Ironically, the single largest story topic of the Gulf War was the search for an end to it. ABC aired 68 stories on diplomatic efforts, nearly all after Iraq's initial withdrawal offer of February 15. But the Allied invasion of Kuwait changed the subject; more than one-third of the war news during the final week discussed the fighting in Kuwait.

The air war was the main story topic for the first two weeks of the fighting, but it attracted less attention as the war continued. By the end of February ABC had aired 52 stories on strategic bombing. The focus then turned to civilian damage in Iraq caused by the Allied attacks. A total of 62 stories documented civilian damage. Stories focusing on damage in Iraq outnumbered reports on Scud damage to Israel by a four to one margin.

Rating the Players

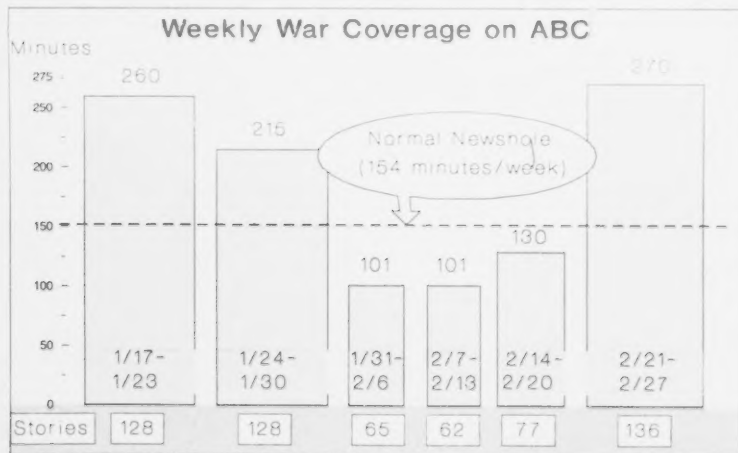
	Percent Positive	Number of Sources
U.S. Government	26%	92
Iraqi Government	21%	38
Israel	60%	15
USSR	38%	16
U.S. Military	97%	94
Iraqi Military	52%	73
George Bush	44%	18
Saddam Hussein	13%	38

Source: ABC World News Tonight, 1/17 - 2/27.

Both Sides Now

Nearly three out of four opinions (74%) expressed on U.S. Gulf policies were negative, almost matching the preponderance of bad press for the Iraqi government (79% negative). This reflects TV's effort to obtain the "other side" of the debate. Large numbers of hostile statements came from Middle Eastern sources--mainly Iraqis and Jordanians. For example the Iraqi Minister of Information told ABC's Bill Blakemore, who was stationed in Baghdad, "these civilian deaths mean George Bush is like Hitler and is a war criminal." (2/14) All but one of the 53 foreign sources (98%) criticized U.S. policy, while 23 out of 39 U.S. sources (or 59%) offered praise. A woman in an Atlanta diner, for example, reacted to the start of the war by saying, "it's great. I mean, it's time we took action." But the three to two margin of praise at home was overwhelmed by the nearly unanimous criticism from abroad.

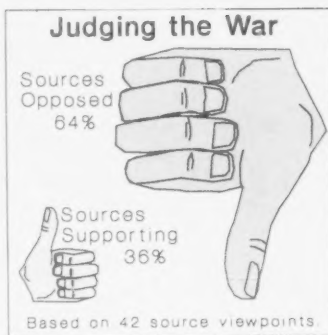
Although U.S. policy was frequently criticized, the U.S. military was constantly praised. Nearly all (97%) of the 94 sources who evaluated our military gave it high marks for its performance. The Air Force alone received 18 positive comments out of 19. Another hero of the Gulf War was the Patriot missile, with 15 positive ratings out of 16. The U.S. Marines snared nine positive evaluations, including this



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from General Schwarzkopf on the last day of the war, "I can't say enough about the two Marine divisions. If I used words like 'brilliant,' it would really be an under-description of the absolutely superb job they did...." (2/27)

A majority of sources (52%) also gave passing grades to the Iraqi military, especially the "elite" Republican Guard divisions. During the third week of the war, one retired U.S. general assured Peter Jennings that, "despite the terrible pounding that they're taking...[the Iraqis] were so well alerted to this operation, so well prepared, that they're able to tough it out." (2/1)



Finding War Wanting

The liberation of Kuwait brought to a climax the domestic debate over the war itself. Opponents of the war outnumbered supporters by nearly a two-to-one margin (27 anti-war vs. 15 pro-war sources). Almost half of the war's critics were demonstrators or members of anti-war groups. For example, one protester condemned the "needless, unnecessary war against Iraq." (1/19) Another demonstrator provided the countervailing view: "As far as I'm concerned, the President's doing the right thing by trying to oust Saddam Hussein from Kuwait." (1/19)

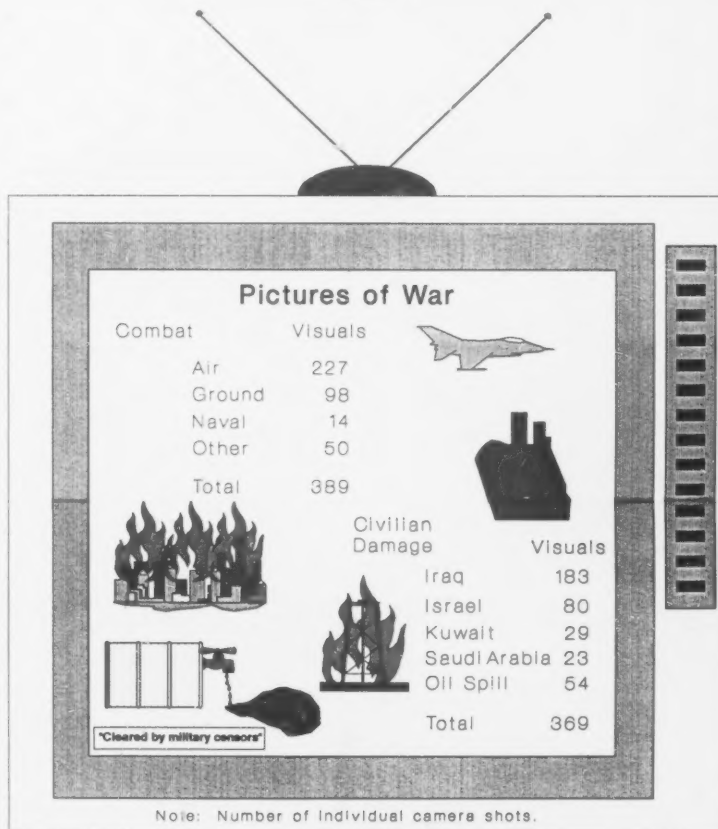
The predominance of anti-war voices was also reflected in ABC's coverage of the demonstrations. Twenty stories focused on anti-war protesters, compared to eight stories on pro-war demonstrators. By contrast, a *Times Mirror* poll released January 31 found that three times as many Americans had attended pro-war rallies as anti-war rallies.

Images of War

The brevity of the ground war meant that most visual images came from the air war. ABC featured 227 pictures of air combat, mostly camera shots provided by the Pentagon from Allied planes, or of Patriot missile launches over Israel or Saudi Arabia. The "mother of all

battles" yielded only 98 visuals of ground combat, about a quarter of all combat visuals.

Damage to civilian sites provided the most gripping visuals. More than half of all images of civilian damage (183) came from Iraq, including 43 pictures of dead or injured civilians. Many of these included shots of the bunker in Baghdad which was destroyed on February 13, killing hundreds of civilians. The high profile given to damage in Iraq contrasted to the coverage of Kuwait and Israel. Only 29 pictures--mostly distant views of burning oil fields--depicted damage to Kuwaiti sites. Nearly twice as many (54) showed damage to the Persian Gulf caused by the oil slick. And despite the Scud attacks on Israel from the war's onset, only 80 visuals depicted civilian damage there, including 17 pictures of human casualties.



The April Media Monitor will feature complete results on TV news Gulf War coverage.



Volume V Number 4

April 1991

The Instant Replay War

Television News Coverage of the Persian Gulf War

This month's *Media Monitor* examines the biggest news story in television history. During 42 days of armed conflict from January 17 through February 27, the ABC, CBS, and NBC evening newscasts broadcast 1,733 stories on the Gulf War with a combined airtime of 53 hours 33 minutes. We analyzed the topics, sources, and the opinion debate on the combatants and their policies. We also examined all "visuals" or camera shots of the conflict and the damage it caused.

Major findings:

Media Monitor (Copyright 1991) is published ten times a year by the Center for Media and Public Affairs, a nonpartisan and non-profit research organization. The Center conducts scientific studies of how the media treat social and political issues. Yearly individual and organizational subscriptions are available.

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■ **Cheers for the Troops** 95% of sources praised the performance of the U.S. military. The Patriot missile alone was praised 52 times.

Page 4

■ **Jeers for the Pols** A majority of sources criticized George Bush, and three out of five criticized U.S. government policies in the Gulf.

Page 4

■ **No War is Good War** A majority of sources opposed the war both before and after hostilities commenced.

Page 5

■ **Protest News** Anti-war protests got nearly twice as much coverage as pro-war demonstrations.

Page 5

■ **The Non-Nintendo War** The networks aired more visuals of civilian damage than of air and ground combat combined.

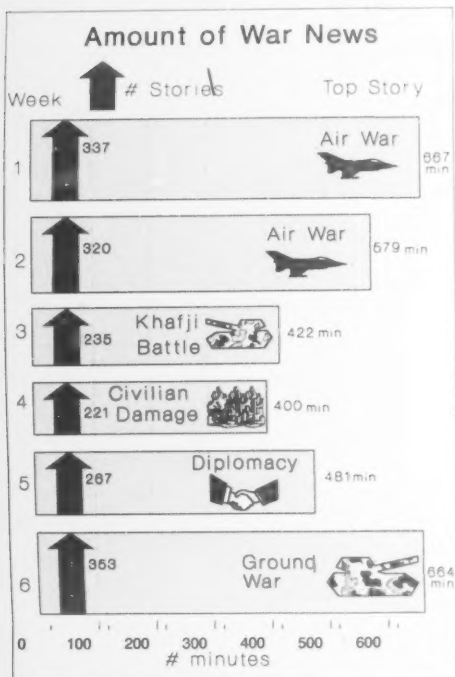
Page 5

■ **Anti-War ABC** ABC was the network most likely to air criticisms of U.S. leadership and policy and to quote Iraqi sources.

Page 6

TV's Top Story

The Persian Gulf crisis triggered more network news stories in a shorter period of time than any event in television's history. From Iraq's invasion of Kuwait on August 2 through the allied cease-fire on February 27, ABC, CBS, and NBC broadcast 4,383 Gulf-related stories on their evening newscasts, with a total airtime of 126 hours 29 minutes. Thus, the three major networks together averaged about 20 Gulf stories lasting 36 minutes per night over a seven month period. By comparison, the 1988 Presidential campaign yielded only 2,301 news stories over 22 months.



Coverage of the war itself produced 1,733 stories lasting 53 hours 33 minutes during 42 evenings of scheduled newscasts, not including the many special broadcasts at other times. War coverage averaged 14 stories lasting 25 minutes per network per night, more than the entire normal network evening newscast. (Many wartime broadcasts were expanded to an hour.) The leading news topic was the air war (339 stories), followed closely by reports about ground action (303 stories). Other major topics included discussions of Allied war strategy (205 stories), diplomatic efforts to end

"Sanitizing the war (to keep)... support for the war high is almost criminal."

-Walter Cronkite
CNN, 1/25

"The networks... have been covering this conflict as if it were a miniseries. Order a pizza and watch a building dis-appear."

-Philip Caputo,
New York Times,
2/24

the war (189 stories), and the war's effect on Israel and the Palestinians (173 stories). A summary of coverage for each week of the war:

Week One: January 17-23 The outbreak of war pre-empted the evening newscasts on January 16 and set off an unprecedented 42 continuous hours of war news. During the first week's scheduled evening newscasts alone, the networks broadcast 337 war-related stories lasting more than 11 hours. Most of the coverage focused on the start of the air campaign (120 stories) and on Israel's role in the war following Iraq's Scud attacks (72 stories).

Week Two: January 24-30 The coverage remained heavy (320 stories) but the focus became more varied. Leading topics were the air war (56 stories), civilian damage within both Iraq and Israel (33) and the oil spill in the Persian Gulf (26).

War Topics

1.	Air War	339
2.	Ground War	303
3.	Strategy & Tactics	205
4.	Diplomacy	189
5.	Israel & Palestinians	173
6.	Civilian Damage	141
7.	USSR	137
8.	Iraqi Military	133
9.	USA Home Front	125
10.	USA Weapons	107

Based on number of stories.

Week Three: January 31-February 6 As war news became more routine, network coverage dropped to 235 stories. The ground fighting in Khafji generated the most attention (42 stories).

Week Four: February 7-13 The Baghdad bunker bombing on February 13 helped to make civilian casualties the top news topic of the week, with 44 stories out of a total of 221.

Week Five: February 14-20 Iraq's offer to withdraw from Kuwait, coupled with mediation efforts by the Soviet Union, made diplomacy the week's leading topic with 71 stories. The focus of air war stories became battlefield

Media Monitor

preparation; 39 stories were devoted to war strategy.

Week Six: February 21-27 The war's final week was also its most intensively covered--353 stories, an average of nearly 17 per network broadcast. The week began with furious attention to diplomacy (85 stories), followed by 131 stories on the hundred hour ground war that began February 24.

War Sources

Military spokesmen and troops were by far the most frequent sources on TV news. Their 1,653 comments accounted for two out of every five American sources. More than 40 percent of the military sources (713) were the enlisted men and women and junior officers who presented a grunt's-eye view of the conflict. Another 360 statements came from senior officers in the field or at the Pentagon. The remainder were

Rating the Players

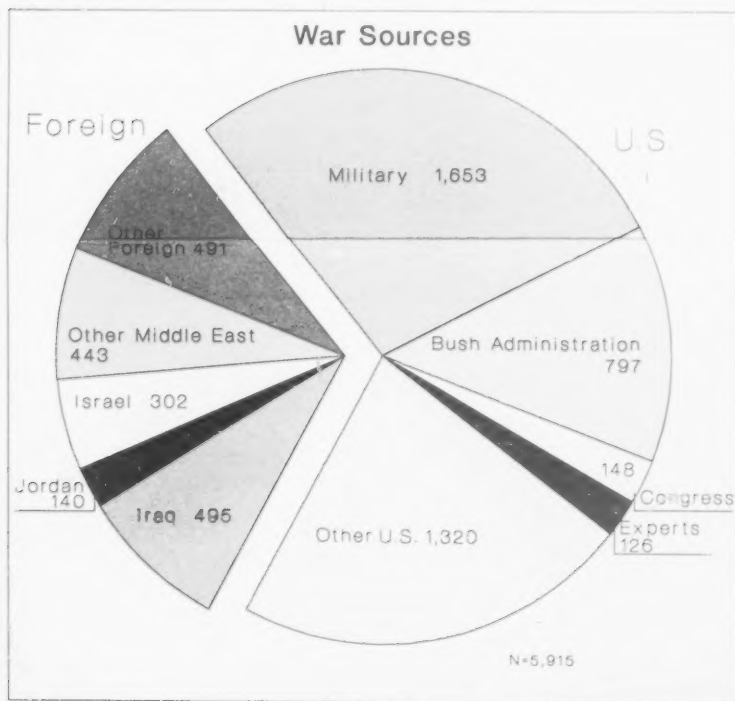
	Percent Positive	Number of Sources
George Bush	56%	70
Saddam Hussein	12%	138
Israel	74%	57
Soviet Union	50%	42
United States	41%	249
Iraq	37%	115
Coalition Allies*	30%	40
Germany/Japan	0%	19

*Includes Egypt, France, Great Britain, Kuwait, Saudi Arabia, Syria, Turkey, and UAE.

references to unidentified "Pentagon sources." Among the services, Marines were quoted the most often. Their 306 appearances outranked the Army's 262, despite frequent sound bites from Army Generals Powell (36) and Schwarzkopf (80). Air Force personnel were quoted only 159 times, and the Navy's only 75 times. The Bush administration was the source of another 797 statements, including 183 from President Bush and 62 from Secretary of Defense Cheney.

Among foreign sources, Iraqis were quoted most frequently, more than all of the United States' coalition partners combined (495 to 447 citations). Saddam Hussein was quoted 68

times, making him the third most frequently cited individual source, after Bush and Schwarzkopf. In contrast to the 495 quotes from Iraqi sources, television viewers heard from only 302 Israeli, 112 Kuwaiti, and 79 Saudi sources.



Rating the Combatants

Despite his visibility, TV news coverage of Saddam was highly negative. Only one out of eight sources who evaluated the Iraqi President provided words of praise, and those sources were predominantly his fellow Iraqis or Jordanians. For example, a Jordanian woman told CBS that, "Saddam Hussein is good....I love Saddam Hussein." (1/24) George Bush received a slight majority of positive comments (56%), with most of his support coming from Americans. More than ninety percent of U.S. sources had praise for Bush, while three out of four foreign sources criticized him. Much of the criticism of Bush was voiced by Iraqis, such as a government official who charged, "Bush is like Hitler and is a war criminal." (ABC, 2/14)

Israel's decision not to respond to Iraq's Scud attacks earned it praise from three out of four

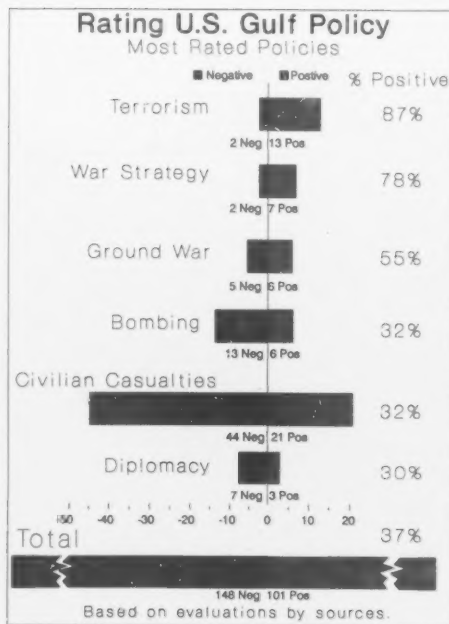
TV news sources, the most positive profile among the Gulf War players. The Soviet Union, in the spotlight for its mediation efforts, received evenly balanced evaluations. The worst press of the conflict went to the Germans and the Japanese. They received unanimously negative evaluations for allegedly failing to support the coalition.

Surprisingly, the U.S. government fared little better than its Iraqi counterpart in the sound bite battle. Nearly three out of five sources (59%) criticized U.S. government policies during the war. Evaluations of the U.S. centered on the bombing campaign and the civilian damage it was causing in Iraq. More than a third of all evaluations of U.S. policy focused on those two categories, and 68 percent of those statements were critical. After the Iraqi bunker bombing, one Jordanian stated, "the U.S. people running this war are either liars or very stupid people. They may have smart bombs but they don't have very smart minds." (CBS, 2/12) Iraqi policy received even greater criticism - 63 percent negative comments from sources. The Iraqis were most often criticized for their Scud attacks on Israeli cities, the release of oil into the Persian Gulf and alleged atrocities in Kuwait.

Rating the Warriors

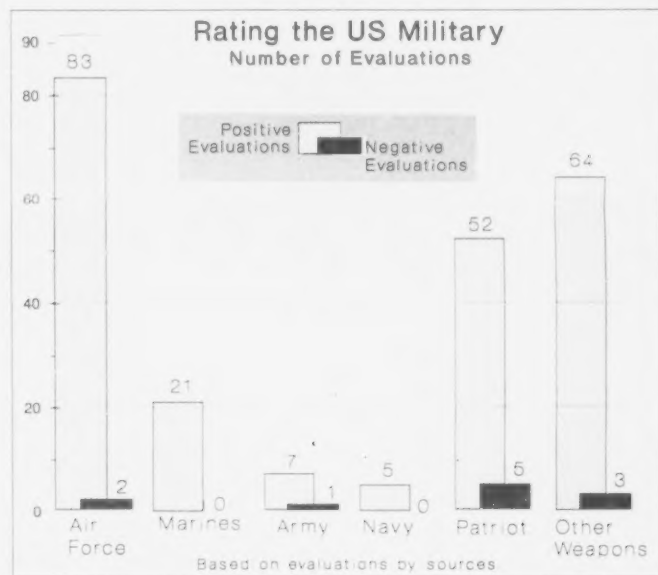
The performance of the American military in the Gulf War yielded almost universally good press: 95 percent of the more than 300 sources who discussed this area praised the military's effectiveness in the war. CBS's Dan Rather summarized the first full day of the war: "In sports page language--this is not a sport, it's war--but, so far, it's a blowout." (1/17)

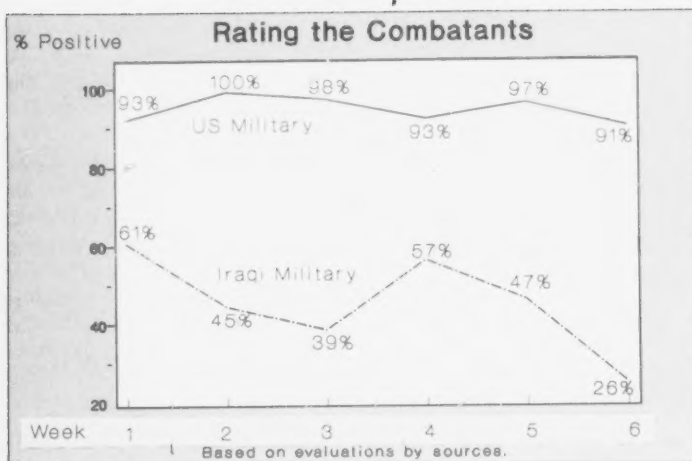
As the workhorse for much of the air war, the Air Force received the largest dose of praise (83 positive and only two negative evaluations). The Marine Corps, which acquired the media spotlight during the ground war as the Army vanished into the western Saudi desert, re-



ceived unanimously positive ratings. Among weapons systems, the Patriot missile was the media darling, with 91 percent positive ratings. One U.S. serviceman called the Patriot "the king of air defense artillery right now, not only for the United States, but probably in all the free world." (NBC, 1/21)

The Iraq military also got fairly good ratings early on, but its reputation slid as the weeks passed. Four days into the war, a U.S. military briefer stated that the Iraqis possessed "some of the most formidable air defenses ever encountered." (ABC, 1/20) During the first week of the war, more than three out of five such estimations of Iraqi strength (61%) were positive. By the final week of the war, Iraq's military power had become the butt of jokes. "That an entire battalion would surrender to a bunch of helicopters," NBC military analyst James Dunnigan noted wryly, "certainly writes a new chapter in military history." (NBC, 2/21)





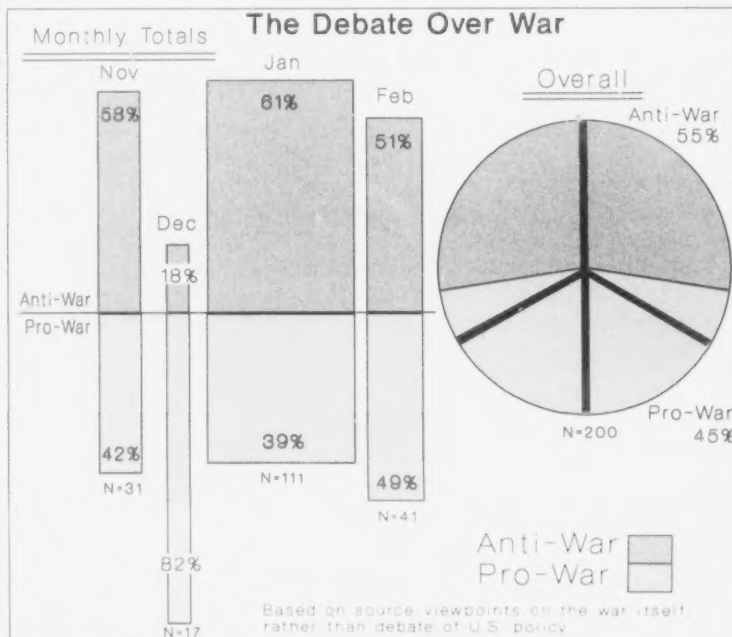
The predominance of anti-war voices was also reflected in television coverage of demonstrations. During the war, the networks broadcast 54 stories on anti-war demonstrations or protests, nearly double the number of stories (28) that focused on pro-war demonstrations. By contrast, a *Times Mirror* poll (released on January 31) found that three times as many Americans had attended pro-war rallies as anti-war rallies.

Although the networks showed more critics than supporters of the war, they described the public as generally supportive. When discussing public opinion, 84% of reporters stated that the public was backing the war. The remainder argued that the public was divided or stressed those groups that remained opposed to the war.

Rating the War

The debate over the Gulf War began not in January, but in November, with George Bush's decision to deploy additional forces to the Gulf. Among sources who debated the merits of using force during the next four months, more than half (55%) gave anti-war opinions. During the war itself, 57 percent of sources voiced opposition. Early coverage was critical of the war option; even Ronald Reagan's former Navy Secretary James Webb was among those opposed to war: "The President's error in sending so many troops should not be compounded by a further error of using them...." (NBC, 11/29) Only in December, with congressional hearings virtually over and most of the organized protests still a month away, did a majority of sources (82%) support armed intervention, although discussion of this issue was light.

In January, the debate moved into high gear, with the congressional vote on the use of force and reaction to the start of the war. The high level of debate in January also saw the lowest level of support for the war, as 61 percent of sources came out against the use of force. Said one U.S. Marine's mother: "I don't believe in war. I don't feel like sacrificing my son for oil." (CBS 1/14) Even as the war ended victoriously in February, the level of support among sources remained below 50 percent for the month.



Images of War

The most frequently televised images of the Gulf War were not of combat or military casualties, but of damage and injuries inflicted on civilians. We coded 1,217 individual camera shots of non-military damage, nearly thirty such visuals per night. Nearly

Pictures of War



counted for the remaining 39. The Iraqis were more often depicted as prisoners; 182 of the 258 visuals of POW's were of captured Iraqi soldiers. Overall, shots of Iraqi military damage (casualties and wreckage such as burning tanks) outnumbered shots of Allied military damage by 387 to 281.

The ABC Difference

Although coverage by CBS and NBC was similar on most of our measures, ABC produced a distinctively anti-war profile. This reflects both the distribution of opinion and the selection of subject matter in ABC's war coverage. In the opinion debate, ABC proved more likely to air criticisms of U.S. policy and leadership than did CBS or NBC. Fewer than half of ABC's sources (44%) provided positive evaluations of President Bush. In contrast, 58 percent of NBC sources and 63 percent of CBS sources praised Bush. Similarly, three out of four evaluations of U.S. policy on ABC were negative. For example, Peter Jennings talked to the Iraqi Ambassador to the United Nations, who protested that the U.S. was "carpet bombing all cities and towns, killing children and ladies and elderlies and even sick people in hospitals." (ABC, 1/22) At the other networks, the policy debate was about evenly balanced--48 percent of sources on CBS and 50 percent on NBC supported U.S. Gulf policies. Sources on ABC were also less likely to praise Israel than were those on the other networks (60% vs. 79% combined positive ratings). Finally, opinion on the war itself was balanced on the other networks but nearly two to one negative on ABC.

We found similar gaps in the selection of topics, sources, and pictures. ABC aired half again as many stories on civilian damage as did either of its rivals. ABC quoted Iraqi sources half again as frequently as CBS and NBC but cited fewer Israeli sources and showed fewer visuals of damage to Israel from Scud attacks. Finally, ABC broadcast the most stories (20) on anti-war demonstrations.

half (48%) of these shots showed damage to civilian areas inside Iraq. Under a quarter (23%) focused on images of destruction in Israel, and one in eight (13%) depicted the Persian Gulf oil spill. These pictures were far from antiseptic; 223 (or 18%) depicted human casualties, mostly from Iraq (151) and Israel (66).

Combat visuals also appeared frequently on the nightly news. The brevity of the ground war insured that most visual images depicted airborne combat. The networks featured 594 pictures of the air war, mostly camera shots from Allied planes, or Patriot missile launches over Israel or Saudi Arabia. Ironically, the number of air combat visuals virtually equalled the number of images of Iraqi civilian damage (590). Images of ground combat, mostly from the last days of the war, totalled 404 shots--just over a third of all combat visuals.

Despite the paucity of Allied casualties in the war, a large proportion of the military casualties shown on the networks were U.S. or coalition troops. Of the 130 shots of dead or wounded servicemen, more than two-thirds (91) were Allied casualties; Iraqi troops ac-

ABC vs. Its Rivals

	ABC % Pos	Others* %Pos
George Bush	44%	60%
U.S. Policy	26%	49%
Pro-War Viewpoints	36%	49%
Israeli Gov't	60%	79%

	ABC	Others*
Stories on Civilian Damage	62	40
Iraqi Sources	212	142
Israeli Sources	79	112
Pictures of Israeli Damage	80	100

Reporting on Recession

How the Media Covered the Economic Downturn

How have the national media covered economic news during the current downturn? During the six months from October 1990 through March 1991, the *New York Times* and the three major television networks ran 957 stories dealing with economic issues. This month's *Media Monitor* analyzes the media's treatment of the current condition and future prospects of the economy.

Major findings:

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...

■ **Situation Serious...** 96% of sources gave a negative appraisal of current economic conditions. *Page 3*

■ **But Not Hopeless** 43% of sources were optimistic about future economic developments. *Page 4*

■ **CBS Bears vs. ABC Bulls** Three out of four sources at CBS forecast bad times ahead. Three out of five sources at ABC forecast better times. *Page 5*

■ **"R" is for Repetition** Reporters used the term "recession" over 800 times. *Page 6*

■ **Silver Linings Dept.** 94% of sources agreed that the economy was in recession. But two out of three believed the recession would be short or mild. *Page 5*

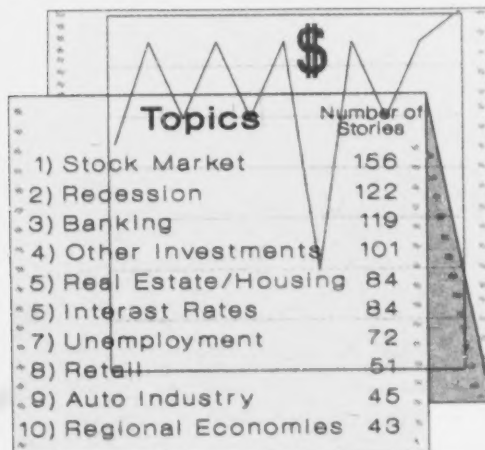
■ **Northeast News** There was more discussion of conditions in the Northeast than in all other regions combined. *Page 3*

Leading Indicators

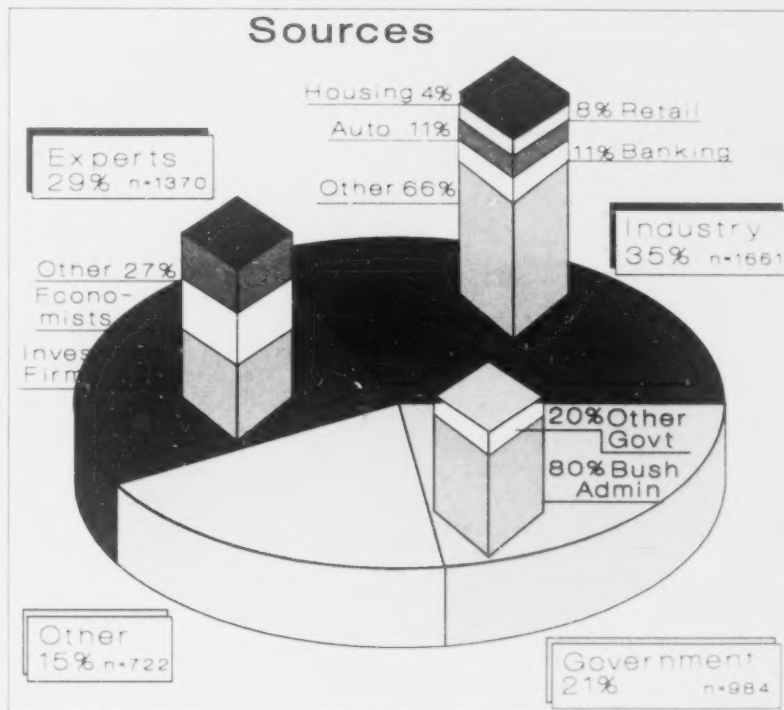
The economy is always newsworthy, and an economic recession is big news. Since last fall, the American economy has generated more news stories than any topic other than the crisis and subsequent war in the Persian Gulf. To examine the scope and contours of economic news, we analyzed 957 stories dealing with economic issues in the *New York Times* and television network newscasts from October 1, 1990 through March 31, 1991. During this six month period, the *Times* ran 618 stories on the economy, representing over 10,000 column inches of text. The three major network evening newscasts aired 339 stories, with a cumulative airtime of 8 hours 35 minutes. NBC led the way with 125 stories totaling 3 hours 36 minutes of airtime. ABC broadcast 110 stories (2 hours 20 minutes), and CBS aired 104 (2 hours 39 minutes).

Money Matters

The leading topic of concern was the stock market. The economic implications of market fluctuations generated 156 news stories. The second biggest story was the recession. Its causes, effects, and likely duration were the topic of 122 stories. Even the recession barely edged out the continuing attention given to problems in the banking industry (119 stories), led by concern over bank closings and the reluctance of banks to lend money. Other investment markets and opportunities, such as the bond and commodities markets, were the focus of an additional 101 stories.



Rounding out the top five topics, with 84 stories apiece, were the slumping real estate market (with special attention given to the Northeast), and the difficulties in borrowing money caused by high interest rates. Close behind was the problem of unemployment with 72 stories. Substantial coverage was also given to retail industries, hard hit by low consumer confidence (51 stories), the slumping auto industry (45), and reports that highlighted regional variations on the economic scene (43 stories).



Whose Views?

On most major news stories involving public policy, government officials serve as frequent sources of information and opinion. But government was a relatively minor player in making economic news. Local, state and federal government officials together accounted for only about one in five sources. Among the governmental voices that were heard, members of the Bush administration accounted for four out of every five. The most heavily quoted sources came not from government but from industry, which represented over one-third of

all sources. Among business sources, representatives of the banking and auto industries led the pack, each accounting for 11 percent of all industry sources. They were followed by retailers (8%) and representatives of the housing industry (4%). The other major source of economic information was a diverse group of experts from outside both government and the industries they assessed. These independent experts accounted for nearly three in every ten sources. The most frequently sourced experts were financial analysts with investment houses. Analysts at firms such as Bear, Stearns and Merrill Lynch accounted for 42 percent of all expert sources. The other major category of experts consisted of economists at universities, think-tanks, and other non industry settings.

"It's like unemployed people are coming out of the sky, there are so many of them."

Massachusetts resident
N.Y. Times, 1/13/91

Bear Today...

The debate over the health of the economy revolved around the severity of the illness. As NBC's Mike Jensen put it, the question was "whether [the] fever can be knocked out with a couple of aspirin, or whether it will turn into pneumonia." (1/29/91) Nearly 1,000 sources offered an assessment of the overall economy or one of its major sectors. Their verdict was almost unani-

mously negative. Fully 96 percent turned thumbs down on the condition of the economy. One economist told ABC, "the economy ... almost looks as if it is sliding off a cliff." (12/7/90)

The sector by sector judgments were only slightly more sanguine. Two out of three sources were bearish on the condition of Wall Street. Three out of four rang up "no sale" on the retail trade. Ratings of real estate, banking, the auto industry, and transportation all neared the 90 percent negative mark. Among the many purveyors of gloom and doom, an automotive analyst called the current state of the auto industry "abysmal", the worst "since the recession of 1982." (NBC 3/2/91) Not to be topped, a banking analyst called that industry "in as weak a condition as it has been at any time since World War II." (CBS 12/18/91) And the CEO of Pan Am disdained comparisons, simply calling airline losses "staggering, frightening" and "a national crisis." (ABC 11/28/90) If these assessments seem sobering, consider that opinion on the construction industry was even more one-sided -- 94 percent negative. And among the 26 sources who commented, not a single one had a good word for the manufacturing sector -- it attracted 100 percent negative ratings. Nonetheless, when all viewpoints on economic sectors are added to those on the overall economy, the balance of opinion actually rises to "only" 89 percent negative overall.

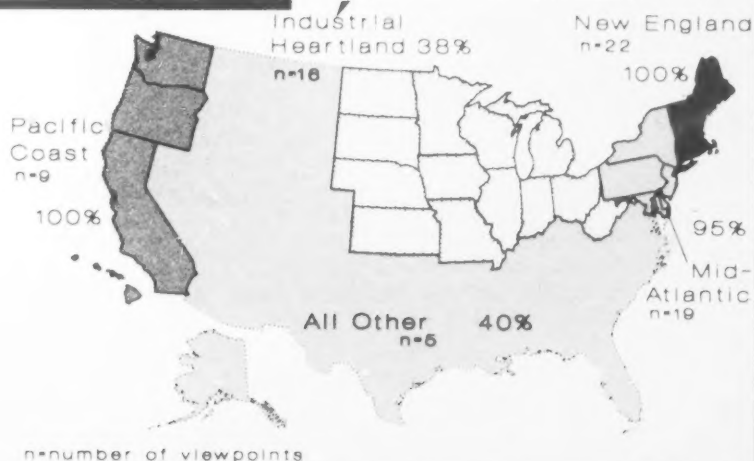
Health of the Economy

Sectors
Percent Negative

General Economy n=631	96%
Finance n=76	67%
Real Estate n=53	87%
Retail n=53	75%
Banking n=44	89%
Auto Industry n=32	88%
Construction n=32	94%
Manufacturing n=26	100%
Transportation n=21	86%
Other Sectors n=69	78%

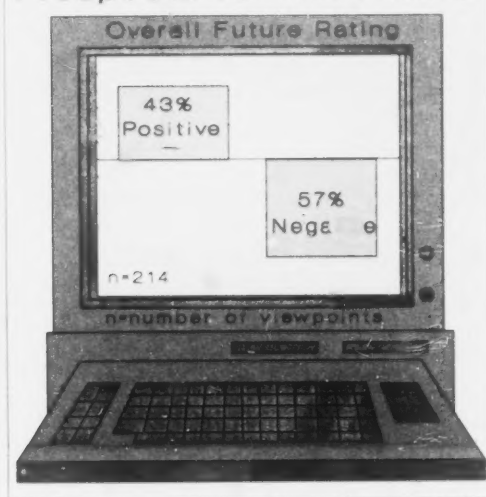
Overall Economic Rating
89% Negative
N=998

Regions
Percent Negative



Portrayals of geographic regions were as downbeat as those of economic sectors. Out of fifty assessments of economic conditions in New England, the Mid-Atlantic states, and the Pacific Coast, a staggering 49 (98%) were negative. A government official's litany of New York's economic woes was typical: "unemployment is up, employment is down, and labor force participation is down. It's construction, it's trade, it's finance, it's manufacturing -- it's everything." (*New York Times* 2/2/91) Only conditions in the Industrial Heartland (the north central and midwestern states) elicited any real division of opinion, with 38 percent of sources voicing optimism about the region. But the greatest variation by region concerned the amount of attention rather than the economic verdict. There was more discussion of conditions in the Northeast, where these media outlets are all based, than in all other regions of the country combined.

Prospects for the Future

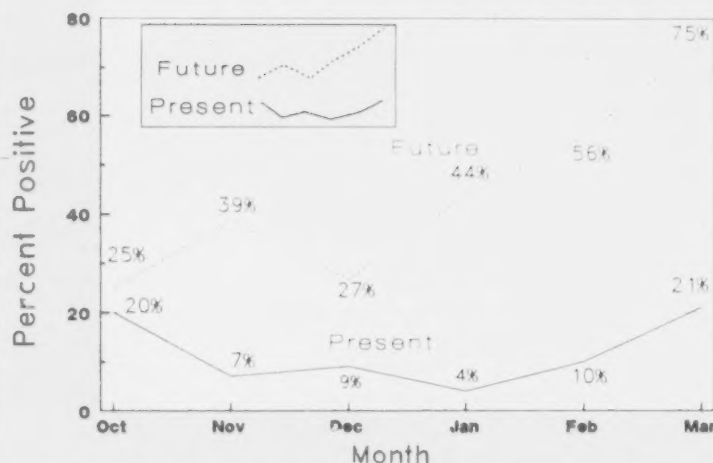


...Bull Tomorrow

If sources were nearly unanimous in painting a bleak picture of today's economy, their forecasts of future developments were more diverse. A majority (57%) were bearish about the future, but that left a large minority (43%) who saw better times ahead. These proportions of bears and bulls were identical for both general economic conditions and sector-spe-

cific forecasts. Typical of the pessimists was an economist who told CBS on February 1, "the recession is not going to end this year. There is a growing possibility if not probability that this recession could continue into 1992." The optimists, while less than Panglossian, were not willing to concede a continued downturn. As one business leader told the *New York Times*, "Overall the light at the end of the tunnel may still be very dim, but it may very well be signaling that the worst is now behind us." (3/2/91)

Rating the Economy



Note: Percent of positive viewpoints made each month.

Assessments of the future were consistently more positive than those of the present, and the divergence grew over time. During October sources were almost as negative about the economy's prospects for improvement as they were about its current performance. Three out of four economic projections that month were negative, as were four out of five assessments of current conditions. Thereafter assessments of the current situation hit rock bottom, remaining at least 90% negative during the next four months, even as predictions became increasingly hopeful. In February a majority of all predictions were optimistic, while current assessments were still mired in pessimism. By March, in the afterglow of the Gulf War, three out of four predictions were positive, a complete turnaround from October's figures. For example, the subject of a "man in the street" interview told NBC, "the real estate market seems to be coming back.

Media Monitor

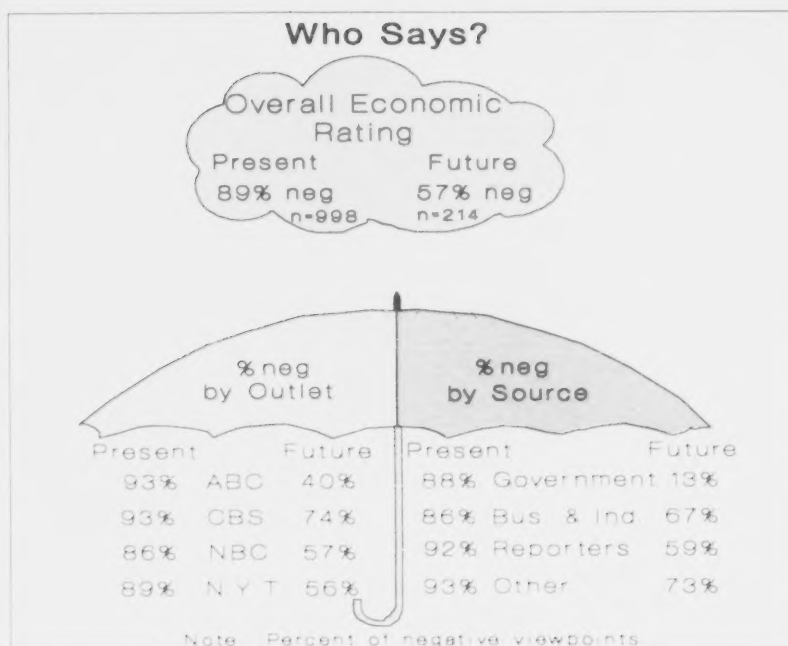
There is a slow turnaround there, Wall Street seems to be coming around, and things are looking good." (3/21/91) Appraisals of current conditions were slower to turn around. They remained 79 percent negative in March, about the same as they had been the previous October.

Whose News?

The portrayal of America's economic straits was so unrelievedly grim that it hardly mattered where or from whom the audience got its news. Bad news predominated at all outlets and among all groups of sources. When it came to forecasting the future, however, there was greater diversity on both fronts. CBS was the network for naysayers, where nearly three out of four sources (74%) took a dim view of the nation's economic prospects. For example, on the second day into the new year, Ray Brady told viewers that private economists expected the recession to be "long and mean." He then brought on an economist who gave this gloomy forecast: "I think it will be in terms of bankruptcies and financial pain, as serious, if not more serious than any recession we've experienced since 1930." (1/2/91) The future looked much rosier on ABC, where three out of five sources saw better times ahead. Thus, Stephen Aug quoted a Commerce Department official, "by the second half (of the year) we expect considerable momentum behind the economy and substantial growth." (1/25/91) The mix of opinion at NBC and the *New York Times* fell about midway between ABC's optimism and CBS's pessimism.

There was an even sharper division of opinion among sources from the public and private sectors. On one hand, industry representatives, economic analysts, and reporters were all predominantly (though not overwhelmingly) downbeat about the economy's prospects. On the other side of the debate were government officials, whose sound bites were resolutely up-tempo. Seven out of eight government sources (87%) predicted better times ahead. This optimist's club was led by administration officials. For example, on February 7 the *Times* quoted President Bush,

Who Says?



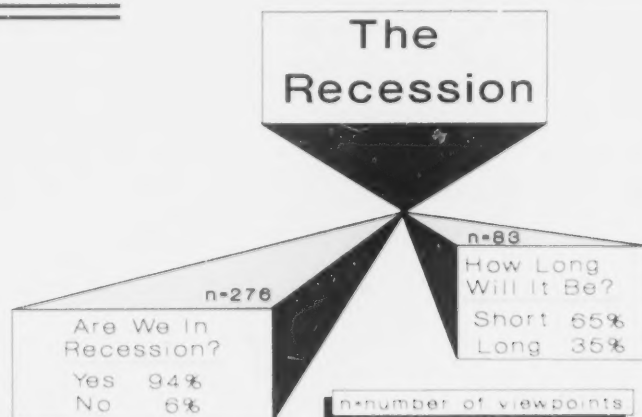
"the current recession does not signal any decline in the fundamental, long term health or basic virility of our economy. America is a can do nation."

"The mood of the country does seem to be changing. The crocuses are poking through."

-Mike Jensen
NBC, 2/28

The "R" Word

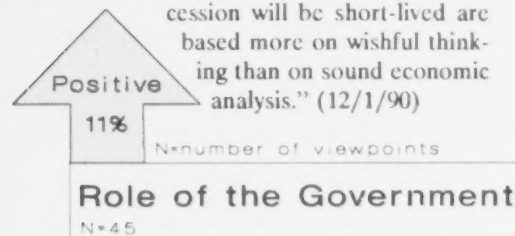
The single question that was asked most frequently in the media was whether the long-awaited recession had arrived. This question gradually took on a rhetorical tone, because the answer was almost always "yes." Out of



Media Monitor

276 sources who addressed this issue, 94 percent concluded that the economy was in recession. On January 2, the *New York Times* reported that even Michael Boskin, the president's chief economic advisor, had reluctantly joined the chorus: "the country has probably entered a recession." With this widespread agreement that the country was in a recession, attention turned to its duration and severity.

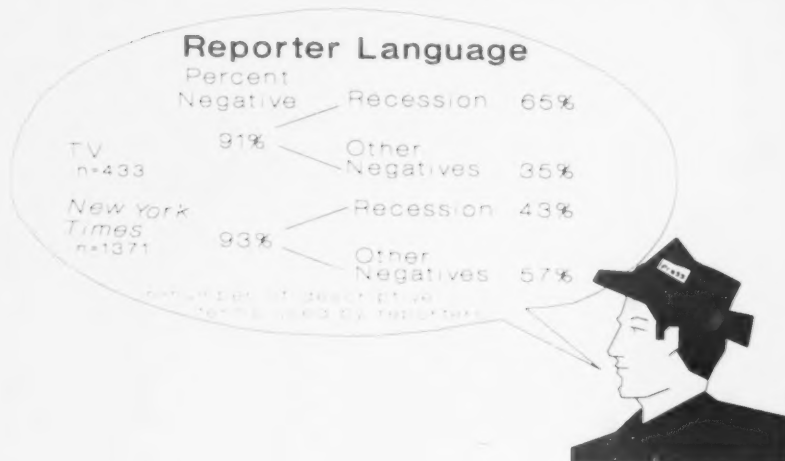
The magnitude of the recession engendered a spirited debate in the media, with optimists for once gaining the upper hand. Two out of three sources argued that the recession would be short lived or not too painful. The most ardent supporters of this position were government officials; six out of seven (86%) downplayed the likely severity of the recession. Typical was an unnamed Bush administration official who told the *New York Times*, "we may already be in a recession, but it will be a mild and brief one." (11/4/90) In contrast to the optimism of government officials, representatives of the business world, along with independent experts, were about evenly split over the magnitude of the recession. For example, an official of the U.S. Chamber of Commerce argued, "predictions that the recession will be short-lived are based more on wishful thinking than on sound economic analysis." (12/1/90)



Blaming Government

While government officials were looking on the bright side, other sources were treating government itself as part of the problem. Among 45 sources who voiced an opinion, 89 percent criticized the government's role in managing the economy. The critics ranged from ordinary citizens to industry leaders. For example, CBS aired a "man in the street" interview in which one consumer complained, "the recession is already here. It's just [that] the government doesn't want to

admit they've screwed up." (1/1/91) And the *New York Times* quoted a senior vice-president at an investment firm, "the Fed's action was too little and too late to adequately deal with the worsening recession." (2/2/91) Despite this criticism, the only praise directed at government during the entire six months went to the Federal Reserve Board.



Bad Language

To better convey the flavor of economic reporting, we noted not only the arguments that were aired but also the language that reporters used to describe the economy. (We excluded terms that were used by sources.) Out of over 1,800 descriptive terms employed by reporters, only 8 percent were positive words or phrases such as "sound," "vigorous," or "efficient." The other 92 percent included such negative terms as "unhealthy," "decline," and "recessionary." In fact, some variant of the term "recession" was employed 801 times. Television reporters were especially likely to employ the "r-word." The term "recession" accounted for 60 percent of all the descriptive language used to characterize the economy on television. By contrast, "recession" accounted for only 39 percent of the descriptive language that appeared in the *New York Times*.

The topic of the June/July issue of *Media Monitor* will be the media's coverage of health policy issues.

"The economy is sinking and sinking fast."

economist
N.Y. Times, 2/12

Media Monitor

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Volume V Number 6

June/July 1991

Our Sick Health Care System

Media Coverage of the Health Care Policy Debate

Health issues are a leading source of news and a growing source of public debate. This month's *Media Monitor* analyzes media coverage of the health care policy debate from October 1990 through April 1991. We examined 447 news stories, including 251 articles in the *New York Times* and 196 stories on the ABC, CBS, and NBC evening newscasts. The topics ranged from AIDS and tobacco to insurance coverage and the costs of health care.

Major findings:

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■ **A Sick System** Most sources rated America's health care services as inadequate. *Page 2*

■ **Cost-Ineffective** Sources unanimously condemned the high cost of both health care and health insurance. *Page 3*

■ **Private Practices** Seven out of eight sources criticized the private sector. Drug companies were the most frequent targets. But insurance companies got 100% bad press. *Page 3*

■ **The National Health** Four out of five sources criticized government health care programs. Only the anti-smoking campaign got a good press. *Page 4*

■ **Faulting the Feds** State-level programs got better press than federal programs, especially on television news. *Page 4*

■ **Medic-Aid** Most sources argued for government intervention. Four out of five urged the government to spend more money on health care. *Page 5*

The Health Beat

Health issues have become a leading source of domestic news. In 1990 the health beat finished fourth on the network news agenda, after the Persian Gulf, the Soviet Union, and the American economy. This month we focus on the policy issues involved in the ongoing health care debate. We examined all stories dealing with health care policy in the network evening newscasts and the *New York Times* from October 1, 1990 through April 30, 1991. This period includes debate over the 1991 and 1992 budget proposals, which highlighted the federal government's role in health care. There were renewed debates over handling the AIDS epidemic as well as concern for mental health care, children's health care and veterans' medical care.

Researchers analyzed 447 stories on health care policy issues. The majority of them -- 251 articles -- appeared in the *New York Times*. The three network evening newscasts aired 196 stories for a total of 5 hours and 34 minutes of airtime. ABC's 79 stories topped the competition, followed by CBS with 62 stories and NBC with 55.

The Nation's Chart

News on health care policy debates was led by the battle against AIDS. Disclosures that health care workers might be infected, along with a widely-reported international conference, helped make AIDS the topic of 84 stories. Debate over the federal budget included changes to Medicaid and Medicare, which were the subject of 57 stories. Providing health care and insurance coverage for America's children was discussed in 55 stories. Women's health concerns were addressed in 48 stories. The costs, availability and security of private insurance policies were debated in 44 stories. The top ten topics also included

Topics	Number of Stories
1) AIDS	84
2) Medicare/Medicaid	57
3) Children's Health Care	55
4) Women's Health Care	48
5) Private Insurance	44
6) Euthanasia	26
7) Smoking and Health	26
8) Costs of Health Care	24
9) Poverty and Health Care	23
10) Medical Ethics	22

Based on number of stories.

the debate over the right to die and the adverse health effects of smoking (26 stories apiece); the soaring costs of health care (24), the problem of supplying health care to the poor (23), and finally, discussions of medical ethics (22).



Hazardous...

There were 96 opinions on the quality of health care that Americans receive. These assessments covered a wide range of services, but in the majority of cases (56%), the quality was found wanting. Among the sources who offered clear opinions, 79 percent criticized the quality of care provided for veterans. Sources held a similarly poor opinion of urban health care (78 %) negative). Only health care services to the poor and members of minority groups attracted worse ratings -- 100% negative. Health care in rural areas and emergency medical services were found wanting by two out of three sources (67%). Prenatal care, health care for women, and community based clinics were criticized by three out of five sources (60%).

Only two areas of health care enjoyed even a modicum of approval in the news: services for the elderly and AIDS programs. Half of those with clear opinions thought that care for the elderly was adequate. Programs to deal with AIDS were endorsed by 60 percent of sources.

... To Your Wealth

If opinion was mixed on the quality of care, it was unanimous on the price. Every source who expressed an opinion on the cost of either health care or health insurance found the prices out of line. Not one of the 32 sources who were quoted attempted to justify the costs of the current system of providing health care. For example, *New York Times* reporter Philip Hilts noted, "The United States health-care system is the most expensive in the world..." (4/8/91) In proposing new Medicare reimbursement rules, federal officials argued, "an explosion of high-cost medical technologies" has made it necessary to consider cost in deciding whether to [pay the bill]." (*New York Times* 4/21/91)

Assessing the Costs

Insurance Costs Too High
100% Negative



n=17

Health Care Costs Too High
100% Negative



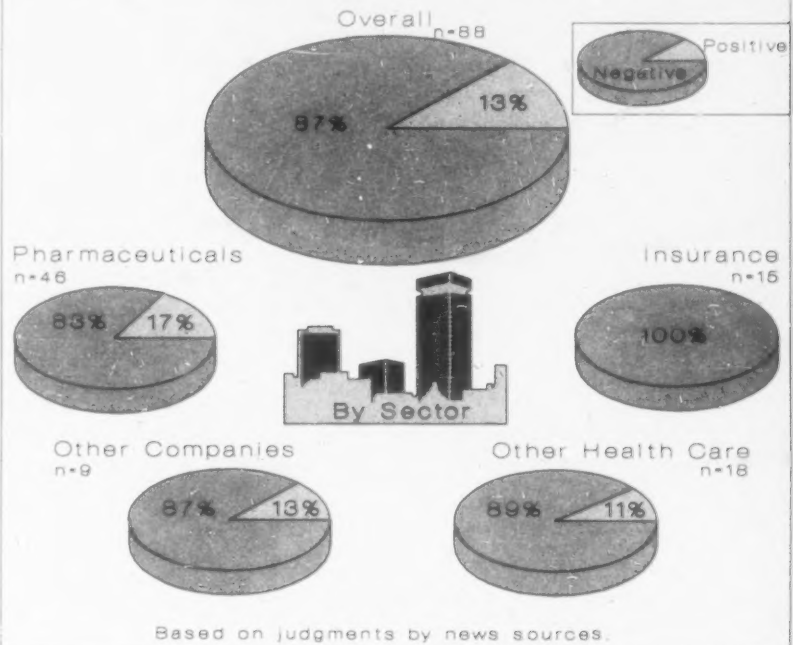
n=15

Based on opinions by news sources.

Private Problems

Private industry played the part of a villain in this tale of inadequate and overpriced care. The private sector was criticized for its performance by seven out of eight sources. For the industries under discussion, the coverage ran the gamut from bad to worse. The pharmaceutical industry was the most frequently targeted. Drug companies were the focus of 46 opinions, 83 percent of which were criticisms. For instance, Senator Edward M.

Appraisals of the Private Sector

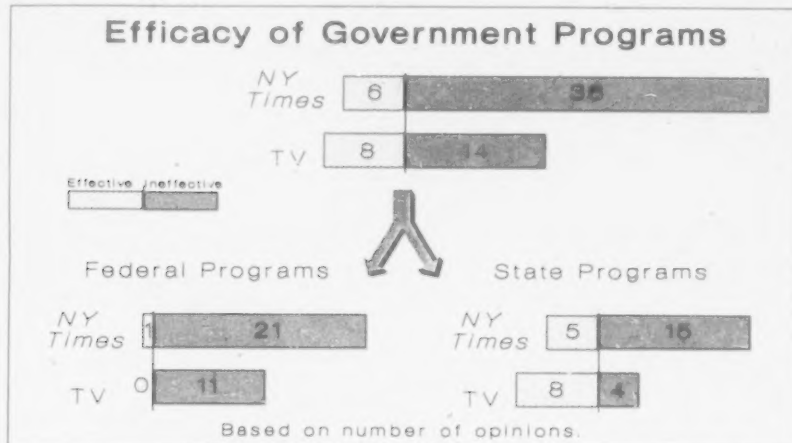


Kennedy (D-MA) charged, "Pharmaceutical companies are spending larger sums on questionable tactics that subvert basic medical standards..." (*New York Times* 12/12/90) In another article a U.S. Attorney charged, "The generic drug industry is corrupted by companies that took shortcuts to get drugs approved, including bribing regulators..." (*New York Times* 12/20/90)

Other companies fared even worse. Almost nine out of ten evaluations of health care concerns (89%) were critical. For instance, a hospital director offered this low opinion of his colleagues: "Some private non-profit hospitals are making unbelievable amounts of money, not paying any taxes and not using the money for research, education or charity work." (*New York Times* 12/18/90). Companies that were not in the health care business did about as badly (87% criticism). Among these, tobacco and alcohol companies were high profile targets. For example, one anti-smoking activist charged, "There is something especially sinister in the way the tobacco companies link healthy sporting life with tobacco." (*New York Times* 4/11/91).

The worst press of all went to the insurance industry, which received universal criticism (100%) on several fronts. Thus, a gay activist

complained, "The private insurance sector has been all too successful at avoiding its share of the costs of AIDS care" (*New York Times* 12/19/90). A doctor observed more mildly, "Insurance is supposed to be about sharing the risk, but nobody wants to share with those who need sharing with." (*New York Times* 4/28/91)



Federal Foibles

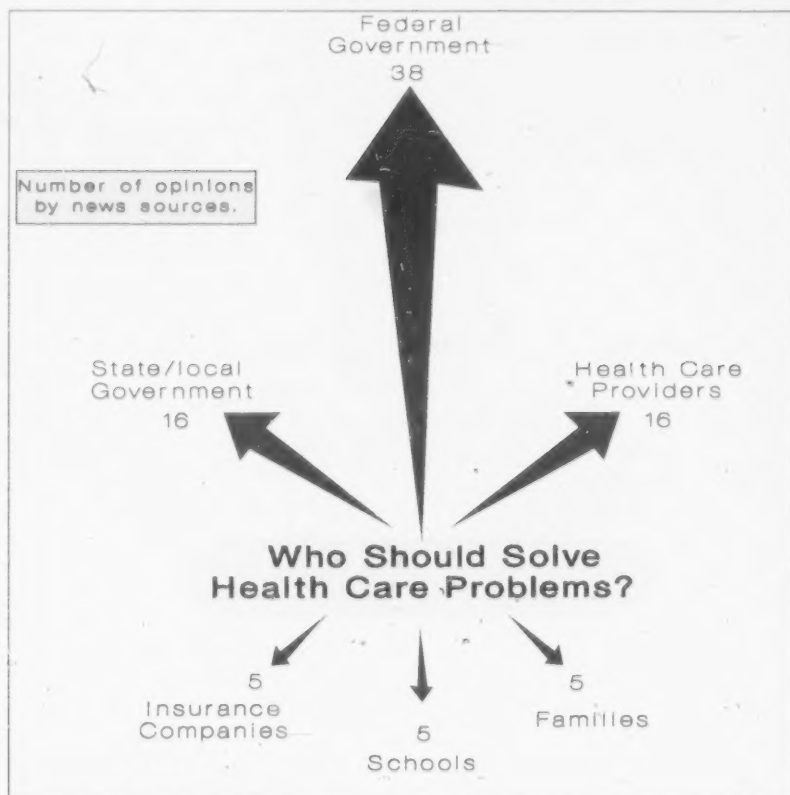
The public sector fared almost as badly as private industry in the court of media opinion. Nearly four sources in five (78%) argued that existing government sponsored health care programs were ineffective. Among the frequently discussed program areas, only one (anti-smoking efforts) was viewed as effective by more than half the sources discussing it. Eight out of ten agreed that Medicare/Medicaid was ineffective. For instance, an insurance executive observed, "Medicaid for the indigent is in a shambles." (*New York Times* 10/23/90) Regulation of nursing homes and government attempts to control health care costs were seen as ineffective by three out of four sources.

Only two government health care initiatives received balanced or positive coverage. First, programs and policies to control the costs of long term care were seen as effective by half of the sources debating them. Second, the media found one bright spot amid the gloom. Government efforts to reduce smoking were seen as effective by three out of four sources. ABC's Brian Rooney noted survey results showing that, "there are 750,000 fewer smokers than there were two years ago, and (gov-

ernment-sponsored) advertisements helped convince people to kick the habit." (11/14/90)

Although the bulk of coverage was critical, government programs fared better on television than in print. On the nightly newscasts, over one out of three sources (36 %) defended the efficacy of existing efforts. In the pages of the *New York Times* only one out of seven (14%) did so. For instance, the consumer advocacy organization Public Citizen charged that the federal government had failed to prevent the dumping of poor patients: "The meager enforcement record represents a serious failure of its responsibility to punish violators" (*New York Times* 4/24/91).

There were also significant differences in the ratings of state and federal government programs. Over two out of five sources (41%) argued that state-level programs were effective. By contrast, federal programs received support from only one of 33 sources, a minuscule three percent positive rating. While federal programs were almost always dismissed on all outlets, state programs received more praise than criticism on television news. Opin-



Media Monitor

ion over the airwaves came down two to one in praise of state health care programs. In the *New York Times*, by contrast, three out of four sources criticized state-run programs. For example, a New Jersey state official described the state's method of covering the uninsured as "terminal" and argued "the system is just collapsing." (*New York Times* 11/21/90)

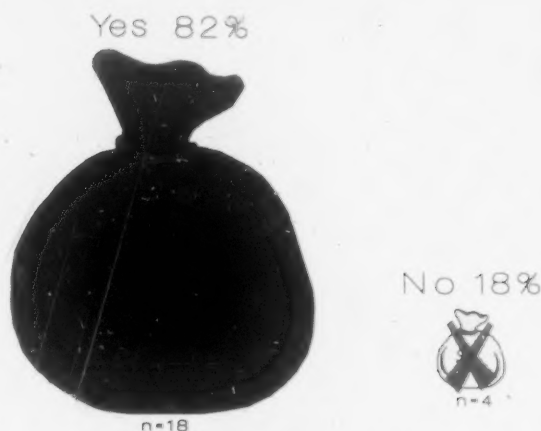
Public Solutions

If government's current efforts were found wanting, it was seen as the most likely source of future improvements. When newsmakers assessed responsibility for dealing with the nation's health care problems, they usually turned to the public sector. The federal government received by far the most attention (38 mentions), followed by state and local governments and health care providers (hospitals and doctors), with 16 mentions apiece. Trailing well behind were insurance companies, school systems and families, each of which were mentioned five times.

A Matter of Money

With so much responsibility being placed on government to solve health care problems, it is not surprising that sources overwhelmingly backed government funding for health care programs. By a margin of more than four to one (82% vs 18%) sources agreed that government should fund health care programs. Most frequently mentioned as deserving funding were methods of handling toxic waste and Medicare/Medicaid programs. A health care policy expert at the Chamber of Commerce typified their thinking, "Expansion of Medicaid to cover additional poor

Should Government Fund Health Care Programs?



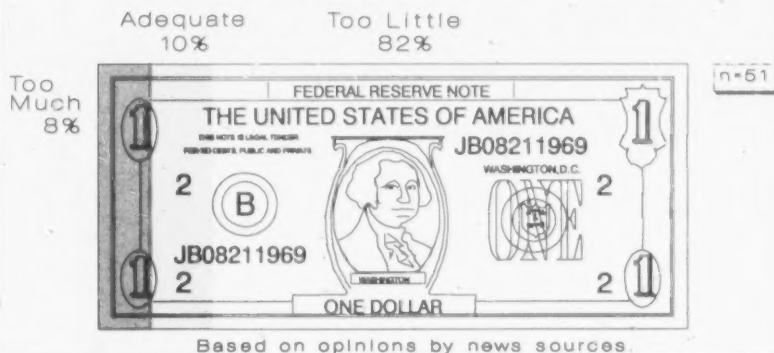
Based on judgments by news sources.

children will produce a better workforce." (*New York Times* 11/4/90)

Just as they endorsed government funding in principle, sources backed increased spending levels in practice. More than four out of five (82%) asserted that government was not spending enough on health care programs. Among the dissenters, 10 percent argued that the current level of government funding was adequate, while eight percent felt the government was already spending too much.

The most heavily discussed areas of funding were the Medicare and Medicaid programs, which were mentioned 18 times. Most sources (83%) found Medicare/Medicaid

Level of Government Funding



spending inadequate, but some argued that government was already spending too much. For example, *New York Times* reporter Jason DeParle explained the zero sum game played with health care funding, "[Medicare] spending cramps other social spending, leaving less to build housing, fight infant mortality, provide better schools, battle drug abuse and otherwise invest in our future." (*New York Times* 10/12/90) Among other topics of debate, increased spending on AIDS treatments and children's health care attracted unanimous support from news sources.

Take Two Aspirin

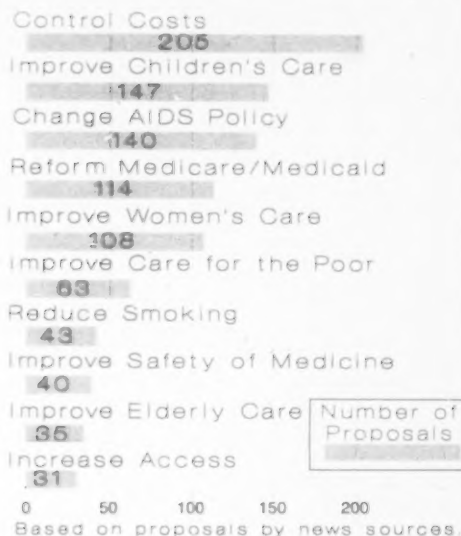
A major focus of news coverage was the search for solutions to America's health care problems. We identified over 1,000 proposals covering almost 200 different ideas. Among this vast group, solutions focused most heavily on five areas: proposals to control the costs of insurance and health care, health care services for children, remedies for the AIDS epidemic, reforming Medicare or Medicaid, and health services for women.

Of the 205 proposals to control the costs of health insurance or health care services, the most common were: standardizing so-called "medigap" policies to make them more affordable (16 mentions), utilizing medical review panels to control the number and cost of procedures (14 mentions), reducing the number of mandatory services included in group insurance policies, requiring employers to provide health insurance, and creating a state sponsored insurance plan for the uninsured (each mentioned 12 times).

Suggestions to improve children's health care focused on: programs to distribute condoms to control disease and pregnancy (52 mentions), improving childhood immunizations (24 mentions) and teaching children to abstain from sex (12 mentions).

Proposals for handling the AIDS epidemic were the most headline-grabbing set of solu-

Top 10 Solutions



tions, with proposals heavily focused on testing health care workers. All told, 76 proposals suggested some form of testing and procedural changes for infected health care workers. More controversial solutions ranged from government dispensing of clean needles, condoms and bleach supplies to drug users (10 mentions) to barring people with the HIV virus from entering the U.S. (11 mentions).

Companies in the News

	Number of Stories
Blue Cross/Blue Shield	17
Metropolitan Life	10
Burroughs Wellcome	7
Traveller's Corp	6
Aetna	5
Philip Morris Co.	5
Roussel-Uclaf	4
Prudential Insurance	4
RJR Nabisco	4
Bristol-Meyers Squibb	4

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Volume V Number 7

August/September 1991

Saving the Children

Media Coverage of Children's Welfare Issues

How have the media covered children's welfare issues? To find out we analyzed all stories on children that appeared in the television network newscasts, the *Washington Post*, and the weekly news magazines during the first six months of 1991. We examined 353 news items, including 144 stories broadcast on the ABC, CBS, and NBC nightly news, 153 articles in the *Washington Post*, and another 56 in *Time*, *Newsweek* and *U.S. News and World Report*.

Major findings:

- **Bad News** Four out of five sources criticized the Bush administration's handling of children's issues. *Page 5*
- **Worse News** 82 percent of sources gave the American education system a failing grade. *Page 5*
- **Better News** Policies favored by liberals fared better than those put forth by conservatives... *Page 4*
- **More News** But conservative policies were debated more than three times as often as liberal ones. *Page 4*

The Clarence Thomas Nomination

- **Borking Thomas** Clarence Thomas's news coverage was more negative than Robert Bork's pre-hearing coverage in 1987. *Page 6*
- **Whose News?** Thomas's coverage was more positive in the *Washington Post* and CNN than the *New York Times* and the "big three" TV networks. *Page 6*

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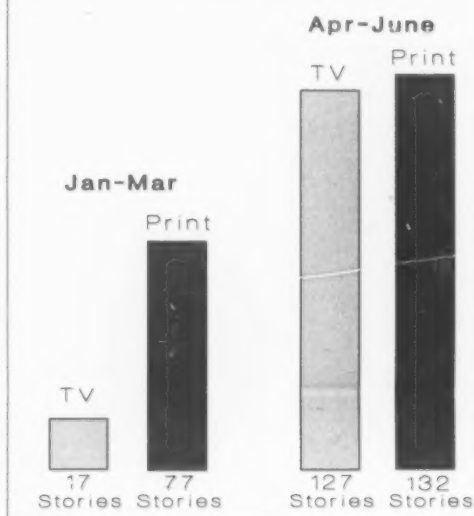
Child - Centered News

The plight of American children came to the forefront of the news agenda during 1991. With attention drawn to the crisis facing Kurdish children after the Persian Gulf war, along with a long anticipated report from the National Commission on Children, the news media focused coverage on the youngest members of our society.

We analyzed all stories about children from January through June of this year. Included in the study were the evening newscasts of the three television networks, the *Washington Post*, *Time*, *Newsweek*, and *U.S. News and World Report*. Television aired 144 stories on the topic with a cumulative airtime of six hours and 27 minutes. Largely due to a weeklong special focus on children during June, ABC led its competitors by airing 47 percent of all TV pieces (67 stories, 2 hrs and 56 min). CBS followed with 49 stories, but featured longer stories on average; two hours and 21 minutes of coverage. NBC aired 28 stories running one hour and ten minutes.

The *Washington Post*, because of its local as well as national focus, featured far and away the most coverage of children's issues (153 stories, over 3300 column inches). The news

Coverage Over Time TV vs. Print

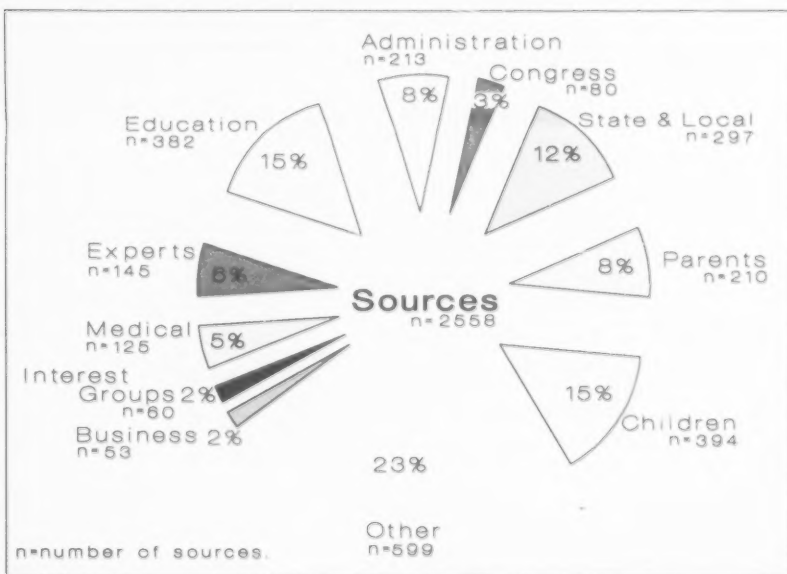


magazines together totaled only 56 articles. (*Newsweek's* special issue on children boosted its coverage. In fact, this issue alone accounted for a majority of all magazine stories.)

Casualties of War

While innocence may be the first casualty of war, news coverage of the innocents was a casualty of the most recent war. Our study found fewer than one hundred stories (94) about children during the first three months of this year. In fact, television aired only 17 during this period.

The constraints faced by television news in wartime were made clear by the dramatic increase in coverage from April through June. While coverage picked up in both television and print, the networks lagged far behind (17 vs 77 stories) early on, yet achieved virtual parity with print (127 vs 132 stories) in the later months.



Look Who's Talking

The news media quoted or cited children more often than any other single category of sources. Family members, those most involved in the welfare of children, accounted for 23 percent of all sources. Children were the most numerous (15%), followed by parents (8%).

Government officials were cited about as frequently as family members, 590 times or 23 percent of all sources. Unlike most policy discussions, however, the bulk of these voices did not come from Washington. State and local governments with 297 mentions (12% of all sources) were quoted more times than the administration and the Congress (213 and 80 citations respectively) combined.

Media Monitor

Sources from educational institutions, such as teachers and principals, spoke 382 times or 15 percent of the total, while experts (such as scholars at "think tanks") were featured six percent of the time. Medical sources (5%), interest groups (2%), and business sources (2%) filled out the list of sources.

From Tots to Teens

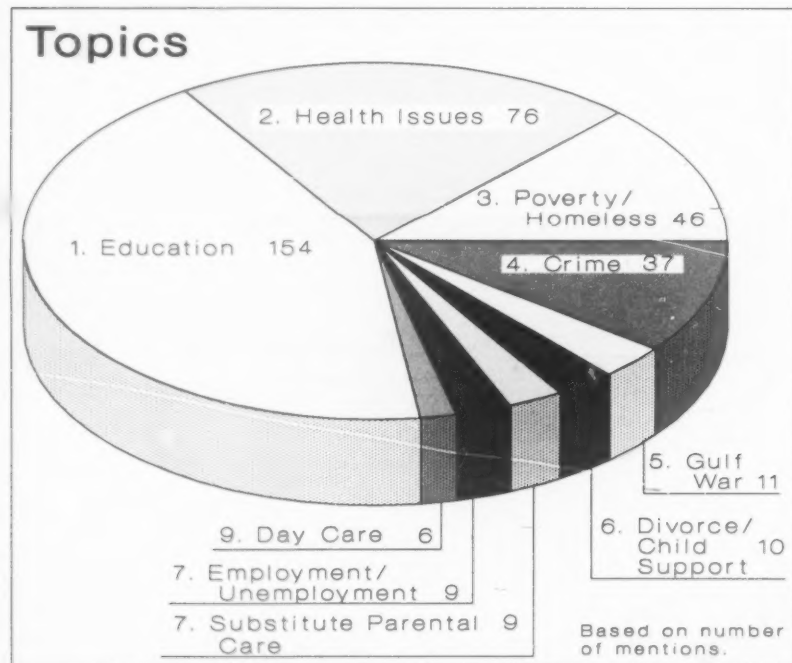
Education was the preeminent issue in news about children. Budgetary problems and innovations in schooling contributed to the 154 discussions of educational issues. This was more than twice the attention given to children's health issues (76 appearances), the next most frequently featured topic. Discussions of crack babies, AIDS prevention, and immunizations all contributed to this tally. The plight of poor and homeless children (46 discussions) struggling with problems of nutrition, and the lack of a stable family unit, ranked third. Crime news (37 mentions) included discussions of juvenile crime and prevention (16 stories), as well as crimes perpe-

trated against children (such as child abuse and neglect, 15 stories). Finally, the culture of crime and violence in which many children live was the subject of six stories.

A second tier of topics included discussions of the Persian Gulf war (11 stories), which was said to be having a negative effect on children, and issues concerning divorce and the need for stricter enforcement of child support payments (10 stories). Youth unemployment and substitute parental care, each with nine mentions, and day care (6 stories) rounded out the list of frequently discussed topics.

Tough Choices

The policy debate revolved around new proposals rather than the efficacy of existing programs. Further, the media dialogue was carried on mainly by sources who advocated their own alternatives rather than criticizing the competition. As a result, most proposals that were deemed newsworthy received relatively good press. Controversial policies ranging from standardized national testing to condom distribution programs were praised by large majorities of news sources. For instance, advocates of national testing outnumbered detractors by three to one (75% positive). Thus, the head of the National Endowment for the Humanities argued, "It is very important that we send a message to the education system that says to kids what your teachers are trying to teach you is important." (CBS 4/18) Tax credits to families with children were also frequently debated and received nearly unanimous support (90% positive). According to ABC's Rebecca Chase, "Changing the tax code would be a simpler way for government to offer middle class parents real help. It will be costly, but it may be the price of keeping families strong." (4/11) Proposals that offered students a choice of schools to attend received almost two to one positive coverage. A former New York City school official said choice can influence student performance because, "The key is ownership, and ownership comes from choice." (U.S. News 5/27)

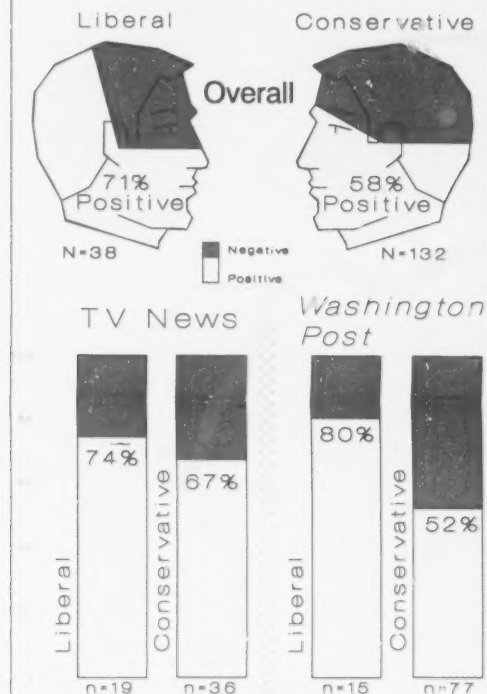


Media Monitor

Other policy options generated lively debate. Solutions such as magnet schools (69% positive), condom programs in schools (67% positive), and school uniforms (80% positive) all received passing grades. A few policy options, however, were soundly rejected. Corporal punishment was criticized by almost four out of five sources. As one psychologist argued, "School discipline should be instilled through the mind, not the behind." (*Washington Post* 4/11) The use of public tax dollars to support private schools (60% negative) and the policy of self-segregating schools to increase awareness of one's culture (57% negative) were panned by the majority of critics.

Some of these proposals, such as funding for "Head Start," received substantial support on both sides of the political spectrum. But others have a partisan cast. For example, tax vouchers for private school payments are favored mainly by conservatives, while support for self-segregated minority schools comes mainly from the political left. To determine how each side's pet proposals fared in the media, we compared evaluations of liberal options (parental leave, condom distribution, multiculturalism, etc.) with those of conservative options (corporal punishment, school "choice," stricter sentencing for juvenile offenders, etc.). Overall, liberal solutions fared better than conservative ones, by 71 percent to

Liberal vs. Conservative Options



58 percent good press. But both sides received support from a majority of sources evaluating them. Further, conservative proposals had far more visibility, generating 132 opinions compared to only 38 opinions on liberal proposals. Politically neutral or nonpartisan options got the best press of all -- 82 percent positive evaluations.

The different media carried somewhat different messages about partisan proposals. The television networks gave liberal solutions only slightly more favorable coverage (74% vs 67% positive). By contrast, sources in the *Washington Post* supported liberal views 80 percent of the time, compared to only 52 percent support for conservative notions. (Debate over these proposals in the news magazines was too infrequent to permit meaningful comparisons).

Policy Options

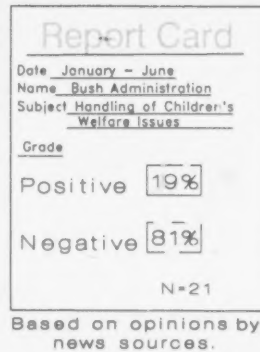
	% Pos	N
Increase "Head Start" Funding	100%	7
Fund Immunization	100%	8
Tax Credits to Families	90%	31
Uniforms in Schools	80%	10
National Test	75%	48
Day Care	71%	7
Magnet Schools	69%	16
Condom Programs	67%	12
School "Choice"	64%	33
Self-Segregated Schools	43%	7
Public Funds for Private Schools	40%	10
Corporal Punishment	22%	27

Based on opinions by news sources.

"Kids Ain't Us"

Despite majority support for the more conservative solutions to the problems of children, few gave high marks to the Bush administration's handling of children's welfare issues. More than 80 percent of all sources criticized the President's efforts. For example, Children's Defense Fund President Marian Wright Edelman criticized the President's budget, saying it, "... has chosen to ignore last year's message of hope and continue the budgetary neglect of the 1980's." (*Washington Post* 1/3) Similarly, Rep. Richard Gephardt (D-MO) contradicted the administration's assertion that its new plan was revolutionary: "Had the founding fathers adopted this definition of revolutionary change, America would still be a part of England." (CBS 4/18)

Administration Handling



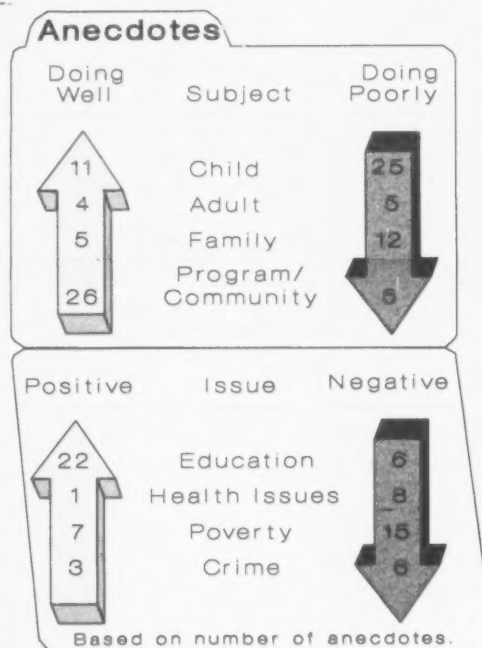
Kevin was found one day climbing into a trash can. According to *Post* reporter Tracy Thompson, "Asked what he was doing, the boy said he was worthless and wanted to be thrown away." (2/7)

By contrast, anecdotes featuring programs or community activities (31 anecdotes) were seen sunny side up. Thus, ABC highlighted a Missouri program designed to teach parenting skills. One expert declared, "Any program that reaches the parents at a critical time and gives those parents a sense of being important to the child is going to change that child's future." Driving home the program's effectiveness, Rebecca Chase reported, "Missouri has found that starting early is paying off. Test scores are up, child abuse is down, but perhaps the most long-lasting result is that parents who get involved early, stay involved." (ABC, 4/3) As this story illustrates, successful educational experiments were the most frequent source of upbeat anecdotes. Conversely, downbeat anecdotes usually focused on the problems of poverty, crime, and inadequate health care.

Intimate Moments

Coverage of children's issues focused on individual experiences as well as more abstract policy debates. The news frequently humanized this story through personal vignettes and anecdotes that illustrated broader issues or social concerns. Although descriptive in tone, such anecdotes may impart a moral about the needs of children and the effectiveness of social and political programs designed to meet those needs.

Almost 25 percent of all stories contained such anecdotes. In fact, 40 percent of ABC's coverage included some anecdotal discussion. The news media used anecdotes both to dramatize the problems of children and to illustrate potential solutions. The struggles of children (36 anecdotes) and families (17 anecdotes) were the most frequent subjects of downbeat vignettes. For example, the *Washington Post* reported on a young product of the city's foster care system. Having spent time in five foster families, eight-year-old



Blaming The System

Although anecdotes about education focused mainly on positive experiences, debate over the state of the present educational system was markedly negative. Among the 17 sources who evaluated education in America today, 82 percent found the system wanting, either in absolute terms or in comparison with other countries. For example, columnist George Will charged, "Never has the nation been safer, and never before has the nation been graduating students less well educated ... Today the principal threat to America is America's public education establishment." (*Washington Post* 6/2)

Doubting Thomas

Initial Media Coverage of Supreme Court Nominee Clarence Thomas

Supreme Court nominee Clarence Thomas's initial media coverage has been more negative than Robert Bork's was at a comparable stage of his 1987 confirmation battle. We coded all evaluations of Judge Thomas that appeared in 157 news stories from the ABC, CBS, NBC and CNN evening newscasts, the *Washington Post*, and the *New York Times*, from his July 1 nomination through August 15. We also coded separately all 35 editorials and op-ed pieces that ran in the *Post* and *Times* during this period.

Among all 337 evaluations of Thomas by news sources, three out of five (60%) were negative. Sample positive: "the best man for the job." (George Bush, *Washington Post*, 7/2) Sample negative: "an extremist who is out of step with the Bill of Rights." (NOW official, NBC, 7/6)

By comparison, Bork's pre-hearing assessments in 1987 were evenly balanced between positive and negative assessments. (*Media Monitor*, 9/87) Although most sources condemned Bork's conservative philosophy, a majority praised his judicial abilities. But most sources have criticized both Thomas's ideology (88% negative) and his abilities (58% negative). Only his personal background, i.e. his rise from poverty to prominence, has consistently received plaudits.

Judge Thomas's press was mainly negative at all seven media outlets analyzed. But he fared worst - roughly two to one negative - at the big three networks and the *New York Times*. The coverage was more balanced at the *Washington Post* and on CNN. Among sources, his praise came mainly from the Bush administration and Congressional Republicans. Opposition was varied most frequently by Congressional Democrats, civil rights groups, and women's groups. Finally, he fared better in the opinion pages than the news sections. In both the *Times* and the *Post*, a majority of evaluations in opinion articles favored Thomas.

Judging Clarence Thomas

	Percent Positive	Number of Evaluations
News Stories	40%	337
Opinion Articles*	54	65
Outlet		
ABC	34	35
CBS	36	28
NBC	33	24
CNN	44	34
<i>Washington Post</i>	46	113
<i>New York Times</i>	36	103
Sources		
Blacks	41	96
Whites	60	108
Republicans	93	57
Democrats	29	42
Civil Rights Groups	19	77
Women's Groups	0	37
Topics		
Personal		
Background	93	15
Fitness/experience	42	79
Ideology (general)	12	25
Views on abortion	25	12
Views on civil rights	17	35
Views on individual rights	0	12

*Print editorials and op-ed pieces. All other figures are evaluations by sources in news stories.



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The Trials of Clarence Thomas

Media Coverage of Judge Thomas' Confirmation Battle

We analyzed media coverage of the Clarence Thomas confirmation battle both before and after Anita Hill's charges of sexual harassment were made public. From Thomas's selection on July 1 until October 5, we examined 442 news items, including 156 stories on the ABC, CBS, NBC, and CNN evening newscasts; 192 news stories in the *Washington Post*, *New York Times*, *Time*, *Newsweek*, and *U.S. News & World Report*; and 94 opinion articles in those print outlets. For the next nine days, from Professor Hill's public charges through the October 15 Senate vote, we examined 99 TV evening news stories and 124 news articles in the *Post* and *Times*.

Major findings:

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■ **The Verdict** Before October 5, a majority of sources disapproved of Judge Thomas in both news and opinion pieces. Page 3

■ **A Matter of Race?** Most black sources criticized Thomas; most white sources praised him. Page 4

■ **Rags to Robes** Sources panned Thomas's abilities and beliefs but praised his background. Page 4

■ **No Winners** President Bush and Senate Democrats each got worse press than Thomas did. Page 5

Hill vs. Thomas

■ **Battle of the Sexes** After October 5, four out of five male sources praised Judge Thomas, but three out of four female sources criticized him. Page 6

■ **Split Decision** Most sources praised Professor Hill personally, but three out of four rejected her allegations. Page 6

This month's *Media Monitor* examines Clarence Thomas's rocky road to his Supreme Court confirmation. Our report is divided into two sections. We begin by examining Thomas's coverage from his nomination through the initial Senate hearings. Then we examine separately the final nine days of coverage from the disclosure of Professor Anita Hill's charges of sexual harassment until the final Senate vote.

Under the Spotlight

Even before Anita Hill raised the issue of harassment, the Thomas story was big news. From his selection on July 1 through October 5 (when Hill's allegations were made public), the four main TV networks ran 156 stories on Thomas during their evening newscasts, with a combined airtime of 4 hours 16 minutes. CNN led the pack, with 50 stories totalling 1 hour 13 minutes, followed by ABC with 41 stories (59 minutes), CBS with 36 stories (64 minutes), and NBC with 29 stories (60 minutes).

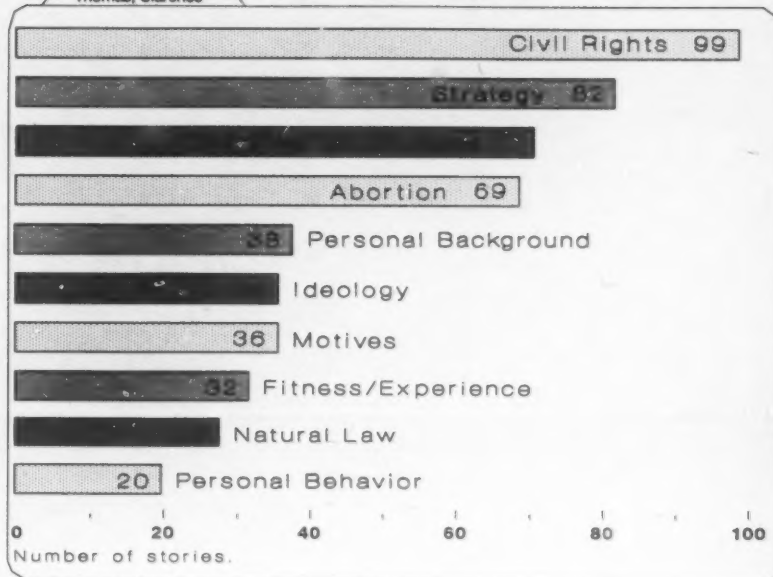
Researchers also examined 192 print news stories on Thomas: 80 each from the *Washington Post* and *New York Times*, along with 32 news articles from the three major news magazines—six from *Time*, 12 from *U.S. News & World Report*, and 14 from *Newsweek*. In addition, we coded 94 opinion pieces on the Thomas nomination: 57 from the *Post*, 34 from the *Times*, two from *Newsweek*, and one from *U.S. News*.

The Thomas File

Civil rights was the leading topic of the Thomas debate. It was featured in 99 news stories, mostly during the summer, as civil rights groups debated whether to oppose Thomas's confirmation. Another 82 stories dealt with the strategies of Thomas's opponents and supporters, with much of the attention focusing on a television commercial aired by a group of Thomas supporters.

Hearings Coverage
Thomas, Clarence

Top Ten Topics



Leading Sources

Individuals	Number of Stories
Clarence Thomas	157
George Bush	57
John Danforth (R)	50
Joseph Biden (D)	46
Howard Metzenbaum (D)	41
Orrin Hatch (R)	31
Patrick Leahy (D)	30
Howell Heflin (D)	29
Edward Kennedy (D)	21
Herbert Kohl (D)	19
Groups	
NAACP	130
NOW	47
Conservative Victory Comm.	32
People for the American Way	19
NARAL	18
American Bar Association	18

Media Monitor

By September the confirmation process itself became a major issue, with 71 stories focusing on the performance of both the nominee and the Judiciary Committee. As the hearings progressed, abortion eclipsed civil rights as the central policy issue; nearly two-thirds of the 69 abortion stories appeared after Labor Day. A second tier of topics included such issues as Thomas's personal background (38 stories) and his views on natural law (28 stories). Stories on Thomas's fitness and experience were featured in only 32 stories, with most reports focusing on his tenure at the Equal Employment Opportunity Commission.

Speaking Out

The media were equally likely to quote Thomas supporters and opponents. Among nearly 1500 partisan sources, 752 were linked to the Administration, other Republicans, conservative interest groups or Thomas himself. A nearly identical 746 sources were affiliated with Senate Democrats, other Democrats, and liberal interest groups. The individuals with the highest profiles were Thomas and his chief backers, President George Bush and Senator John Danforth. The remaining top sources were all members of the Judiciary Committee, and all but one (Orrin Hatch) were Democrats. Democratic committee members averaged 23.4 citations, to 14.3 quotes per Republican member.

Liberal interest groups were quoted nearly four times as often as their conservative counterparts (329 to 83). The only conservative group to appear frequently was the Conservative Victory Committee, whose negative TV ad sparked controversy in early September. The NAACP, National Organization for Women, People for the American Way, and the National Abortion Rights Action League were among Thomas's most publicized opponents. The media also sought advice from legal scholars, especially law school professors, who made 72 appearances to state their views. Black conservatives, a relatively obscure group before Thomas's selection, received a burst of attention as they were quoted 25 times.

Judging the Judge

Among the 766 opinions expressed in news stories about Thomas prior to October 6, four out of seven (57%) offered criticism or opposition. Editorials and op-ed articles featured an almost identical tilt--54 percent negative. Thomas did better in the *Post's* op-eds than in

Judging Clarence Thomas

	Percent Positive	Percent Negative	Total Evals
News Stories	43%	57%	766
Opinion Articles*	46	54	175
Outlet			
ABC	38	62	64
CRS	40	60	50
NBC	41	59	49
CNN	45	55	69
Washington Post	49	51	239
New York Times	39	61	240
News Magazines	44	56	55
Topics			
Personal Background	95	5	42
Fitness/experience	42	58	153
Ideology (general)	15	85	54
Views on abortion	21	79	29
Views on civil rights	20	80	51
Views on individual rights	0	100	17
Confirmation Performance	31	69	98
Sources			
Blacks	39	61	172
Whites	54	46	332
Republicans	94	6	128
Democrats	29	71	189
Civil Rights Groups	19	81	99
Women's Groups	0	100	63

*Print editorials and op-ed pieces. All other figures are evaluations by sources in news stories.

the *Times's* (only 53% negative in the *Post*, compared to 61% in the *Times*). Another difference: the editors of the *Post* endorsed Thomas for the Court, while the *Times* eventually opposed his confirmation. This editorial split was reflected in news articles: While coverage of Thomas in the *Post* was mainly balanced, he received praise from fewer than

two out of every five sources (39%) in the *Times*. Overall, Thomas received his most positive coverage in the *Post*. His evaluations on ABC, CBS, and NBC tended to mirror those in the *Times*, while CNN's debate (55% negative) virtually matched that of the three news magazines (56% negative).

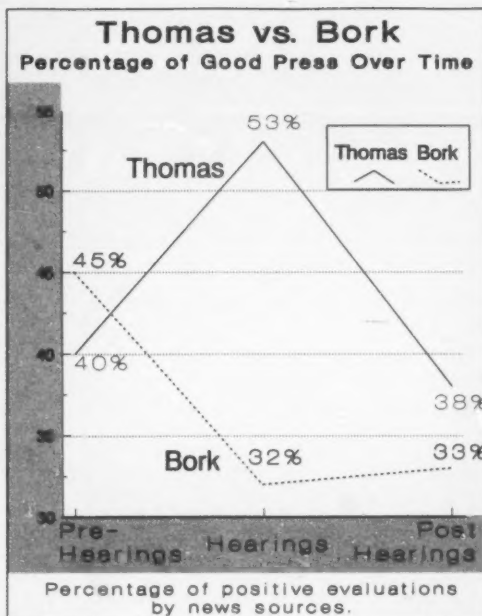
Thomas received his best press (95% positive) on his personal background, especially his rise from Pin Point, Georgia to the federal bench. For example, the *Post* quoted Senator Orrin Hatch as saying, "I have to tell you, Judge Thomas, I am so doggone proud of you I can hardly stand it." (9/12) By contrast large majorities of news sources criticized both Thomas's fitness and his philosophy. Nearly three out of five news sources (58%) assailed Thomas's capacity for the job, including ratings of his intellectual fitness and his past government service. An even greater percentage (69%) criticized Thomas's performance at his confirmation hearings. NARAL President Kate Michelman complained on NBC, "He has stonewalled every Senator, every question, refusing to answer on the question of whether there is a constitutional right-to-choose." (9/11)

The criticism of Thomas's beliefs was more intense. The various aspects of his philosophy were opposed by 82 percent of sources, with most attention going to his views on abortion and civil rights. Typical was AFL-CIO President Lane Kirkland's statement on ABC, "The President's apparent resolve to make the Court the preserve of the far-right wing leaves us with no choice but to oppose Judge Thomas." (7/31)

Evaluations of Thomas also differed according to the race of those quoted. A majority of white sources (54%) supported Thomas. By contrast, more than three out of five African-American sources (61%) rejected Thomas. For example, black legal scholar Derrick Bell, told ABC that "to place a person who looks black and who, in conservative terms, thinks white, is an insult." (7/1)

Did the coverage affect public opinion? Gallup polls show that the proportion of those favoring Thomas's confirmation remained

steady from July through September, at just over 50 percent. But his opposition rose from 17 to 25 percent, as the undecideds apparently broke against him. Black opposition to Thomas grew the most--in September, 32 percent of African-Americans opposed Thomas's confirmation, compared to only 18 percent opposed in July. This shift occurred as the media reported mostly criticism of Thomas by black leaders.



Back to Bork

Since Robert Bork's 1987 confirmation battle, Supreme Court confirmation battles have been fought in the media as well as the Senate. We compared media coverage of Thomas this year to that of Bork four years ago (*Media Monitor*, October 1987). Overall, Thomas fared better than his predecessor (57% negative evaluations, compared to 63% negative for Bork). Thomas, however, encountered negative coverage from the start; Bork's press remained relatively favorable until his Senate Judiciary Committee hearings. Bork's hearings, however, proved his undoing, as two out of three sources (68%) criticized him from that point forward. For Thomas, his hearings were one of his better moments--a majority (53%) of sources praised Thomas during the week he testified, although his press score later slipped, as Senators and others voiced dissatisfaction with his testimony.

Bork and Thomas fared equally poorly when it came to ideology, as 82 percent of sources criticized their respective conservative philosophies. Bork was seen as the more qualified; a majority (51%) of sources praised his qualifications, while 58 percent criticized Thomas on that score. Thomas's main asset was his background. The 95 percent positive ratings Thomas received on that score were enough to boost his media image above that of Bork.

Here's Mud in Your Eye

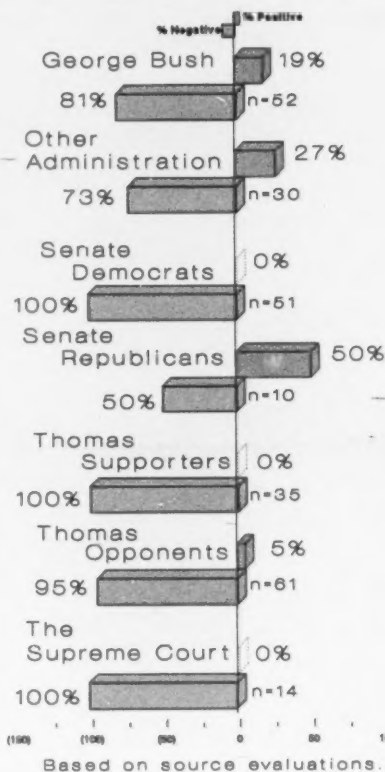
Opponents and supporters of Judge Thomas not only disagreed over his confirmation, they also criticized each other. For example, 81 percent of sources criticized Bush's handling of the Thomas nomination. Yet the president's press was better than most. Key Senators, the Judiciary Committee, the White House, and even the Supreme Court were all roundly criticized by news sources.

Senate Democrats came in for some of the roughest treatment, with no sources providing praise, compared with 51 statements of criticism. For example, NOW's Patricia Ireland charged that "the Reagan-Bush Republican court-packing strategy could not have been accomplished without the active complicity of the Democrats in the Senate." (NBC, 7/6) Senators Joseph Biden and Edward Kennedy were the judiciary panel members singled out for the most criticism, mainly as the result of a negative television ad prepared by the Conservative Victory Committee. Repeated clips or citations of their ad provided nearly half of the Democrats' negatives. In response, news sources dished back 32 negative evaluations of the ad's creators.

Round 2 -- Anita Hill

Anita Hill's charges of sexual harassment triggered new interest in the Thomas story and led to saturation television coverage. From October 6 until the October 15 Senate vote, the four network evening newscasts ran 99 stories on the sudden scandal, in addition to the many hours of live coverage of the hearings. In nine days the evening news shows aired 4 hours 8 minutes of coverage of the Thomas story, nearly surpassing the total coverage given to Thomas during the prior three months. We also coded 63 news stories in the *New York Times*, and 61 in the *Washington Post*--an average of about seven stories per day for each paper.

Rating the Players



While the specifics of the Hill-Thomas dispute drew the most attention, the media struck up broader themes as well. More than a third of the stories (78) also dealt with criticisms of the Senate's confirmation process. And 48 stories (an average of more than five per day) focused on the issue of sexual harassment apart from Hill's own story.

Hill v. Thomas

The centerpiece of the coverage was, of course, the dispute between Anita Hill and Clarence Thomas. Surprisingly, both individuals received more praise than criticism: 63 percent positive comments for Hill, and 58 percent positive for Thomas. On CBS, CNN, and in the *Washington Post*, the accuser received better press than the nominee, while they

Hill vs. Thomas (Percent Positive Evaluations)

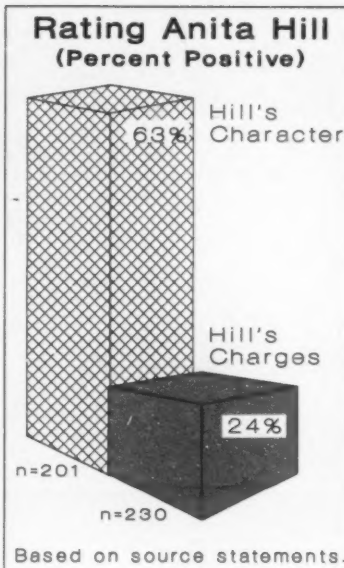
	Hill	Thomas
Total	63% (n=201)	58% (n=375)
ABC	64	64
CBS	77	57
NBC	50	48
CNN	74	58
Washington Post	58	52
New York Times	63	64
Pre-hearings	81	57
Hearings	53	59
Males	54	81
Females	75	26
Whites	61	77
Blacks	55	36
Democrats	93	69
Republicans	12	90

Based on source statements in news stories.

Media Monitor

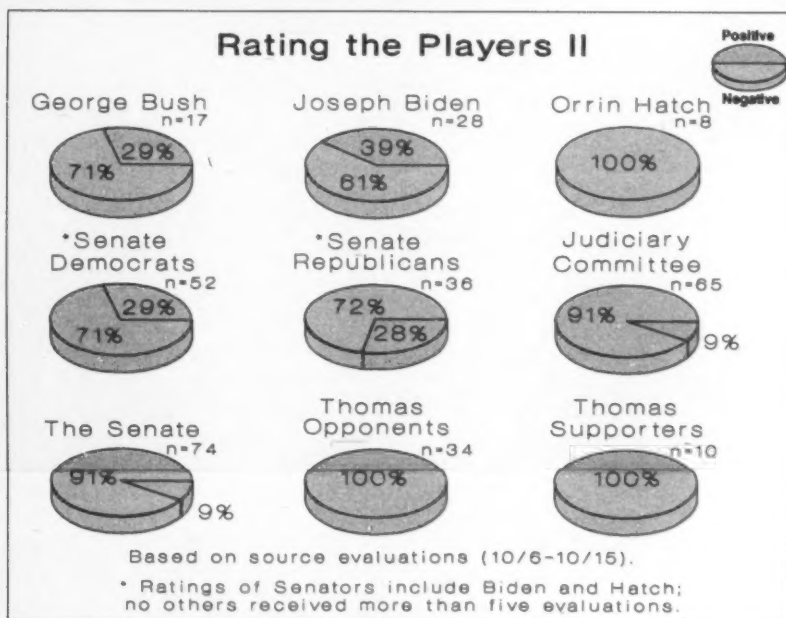
were treated about equally on ABC, NBC, and in the *New York Times*. Still, Thomas's proportion of good press during this final phase was higher than at any other point in his confirmation quest. Most Democrats muted their criticism, while some, such as Bennett Johnston (D-LA), proffered support: "The question is who is telling the truth and I simply believe it was overwhelmingly in favor of Judge Thomas." (CBS, 10/15)

The media presented a gender gap in evaluations of the two main participants. Judge Thomas received mainly praise from news sources identified as males (81% positive) and criticism from female sources (74% negative). Professor Hill received far more praise from female sources (75% positive) than she did from males (54% positive). Even if Hill's and Thomas's own statements are removed, the gender gap persists, with



this country that I am embarrassed that President Bush put someone up there who he knew had skeletons in the closet." (10/14) Both Hill and Thomas were given mainly positive comments from white sources, although Thomas (77% positive) did better than Hill (61% positive).

While Anita Hill received mainly favorable press, her charges against Thomas were greeted with skepticism. Although 63 percent of news sources praised Hill personally, more than three out of four (76%) expressed doubt or outright hostility towards her allegations. Thus, CBS quoted her old high school teacher praising her character: "This girl's for real. Anything she says you can take to the bank because it will be the truth." (10/10) But EEOC official Rosalie Silberman criticized her story in the *Times*: "She misinterpreted him. She heard something she wanted to hear." (10/12)



Thomas's proportion of good press 18 points higher among men, and Hill's 8 points higher among women.

Professor Hill fared better among blacks as well as women. A majority of sources identified as African-American (55%) praised Hill, while nearly two out of three (64%) criticized Thomas. For example, the *Times* quoted one woman, "There are so many educated, just stellar lawyers who are African-American in

All Fall Down

Clarence Thomas and Anita Hill both fared far better in the press than the other players in this media drama. Among the two most visible Senators, Joseph Biden (D-DE) was criticized six times out of ten; Orrin Hatch's (R-UT) media profile was 100 percent negative. Overall, committee Republicans and Democrats each attracted more than 70 percent negative judgments.

The institution fared even worse than individual members. Nine out of ten sources criticized both the Judiciary Committee and the Senate as a whole. Law professor Mary Frances Berry charged, "We are outraged that the Senate is not taking seriously charges of sexual harassment against a black woman." (Post, 10/8) She was seconded by NARAL's Kate Michelman: "I'm taken aback by how incredibly difficult it's been to get them to understand." (Post, 10/9) The nominee himself provided his own critique of the Senate. Comparing the hearings to a "high-tech lynching," Thomas charged that he was "a victim of this process." (Times, 10/12)